THE LIFE OF ERASMUS

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ERASMUS

ERASMUS

Engraved by T. Lupton (1823) from the original by Hans Holbein in the possession of F. P. Ord, Esq.

ERASMUS

BY

ERNEST F. H. CAPEY

WITH THIRTEEN ILLUSTRATIONS

NEW YORK
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Nomen Erasmi nunquam peribit
—Jno. Colet, Epist. XII

PREFACE

DR. JAMES HAMILTON, of Regent Square Presbyterian Church, London, wrote the following pathetic passage in his diary, under date, 17th May, 1865:—

"For a good many years I have cherished a hope of doing something towards the Life and Times of Erasmus. The subject is very attractive, and with translations of some of his livelier letters and the more amusing passages in his *Colloquies*, I fancy it might have been made entertaining. At all events, I should have liked to point out his special position and service. He not only did more than any other man towards the revival of letters, but he has left both religion and philosophy under endless obligations as *the restorer of good sense*. The 'sound mind,' the love of the practical, the true, and the useful, was his distinguishing characteristic; and it was this, as much as the love of the beautiful, which carried him with such ardour into the study of classical antiquity. . . . It would have been very pleasant to revise that prodigious range of literature, patristic

and classical, of which Erasmus was the editor. Owing to a secluded boyhood and unlimited youthful leisure, without ever attaining accurate scholarship, I have read in these departments more than most people; and, after an abstinence of a quarter of a century, a strange longing for these books returns. Like the daisies and dandelions that come up in October, it is the feeble revival of an impossible spring. For, after giving to the work the spare hours and autumn holiday of the last two or three years, I am constrained to abandon the task. This last winter had no leisure, and in the congregation a childish feud about the hymn-book was so conducted as to rob me of rest by night, and peace by day; and, perhaps as a consequence of this, I find my elasticity a good deal impaired. So this day, with a certain touch of tenderness, I restored the eleven tall folios to the shelf, and tied up my memoranda. . . . It is well. . . ."[1]

One is inclined to contest this verdict, and to harden the heart against the agitators who stirred up the "childish feud". Since the day of Dr. Hamilton's great surrender, several able biographies of Erasmus have appeared, besides numerous "studies" in histories and reviews, but

[1] *Life of James Hamilton, D.D., F.L.S.* By William Arnot, pp. 537-39.

the sense of loss consequent upon the tying up of the memoranda of the Presbyterian divine remains.

In preparing our little biography we have sought, in the interests of the general reader, to reduce footnotes and references to a minimum. As Mark Antony used to speak, so most persons like to read—"right on"—without the distraction of symbols. The student may be trusted to find his way through the "eleven tall folios" of the Leyden edition (1703-1706), the work from which translations of the letters and treatises have been made. Translations adopted from other works are acknowledged *in loco*, and their sources indicated. We are indebted to former biographers, one and all, and especially to Mr. F. M. Nichols, whose valuable work on the *Epistles of Erasmus* (to his fifty-first year) came to hand after our manuscript had been completed, but still in time for us to add several interesting letters and important facts.

Our thanks are due, and are hereby gratefully tendered to Messrs. Longmans, Green & Co., the publishers of Mr. Nichols' book, and of Mr. J. A. Froude's *Life and Letters of Erasmus*, as also to Messrs. Smith, Elder & Co., and Messrs. G. P. Putnam's Sons for permission to make occasional extracts (duly noted in the text) from Mr. R. B.

Drummond's work, *Erasmus: His Life and Character*, and Dr. Emerton's *Life of Erasmus*, respectively.

It is a pleasure to acknowledge the kindness and courtesy of helpers in the preparation of the bibliography (appendix ii.). Every care has been taken to ensure accuracy and completeness on the lines laid down. Our lists have passed through the scholarly hands of Mr. Henry Guppy, of the Rylands Library, Manchester, the Rev. W. Edmund Crothers, of Wimbledon, and, we are proud to add, Mr. Ferdinand Van der Haeghen, the learned librarian of the Ghent University. Our hope is that this survey of Erasmian literature will incite students to labour, so that at no distant day all the principal works may appear in worthy English editions.

It will be a great honour if we have done something in this modest volume to lessen, in however small a degree, the sense of loss occasioned by the non-realisation of Dr. Hamilton's dream.

E. F. H. C.

July, 1902.

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ERASMUS

CHAPTER I

BIRTH—SCHOOLDAYS—THE BATTLE WITH THE GUARDIANS

"THE circumstances of my birth were unhappy indeed," Erasmus once confessed to a friend. We give the outline of the story which has served as a piquant morsel for gossipy tongues from the fifteenth century unto this day.

Gerard, the father of Erasmus, was born at Gouda (Tergau) in Holland, and was the youngest but one of ten sons. Parents thus blessed deemed themselves under obligation to set apart at least one youth for the service of God. The choice fell upon Gerard. Not only would the monastic habit fit him well, but, it was urged, lustre and sanctity would be added to the family name. The young man's ambition, however, was not of the priestly kind; his face and heart were too gay; besides, and this was the more serious obstacle, his love for Margarita, the daughter of a physician at Sieben Bergen, stood in the way. The opposition of his parents to the marriage not only strengthened his

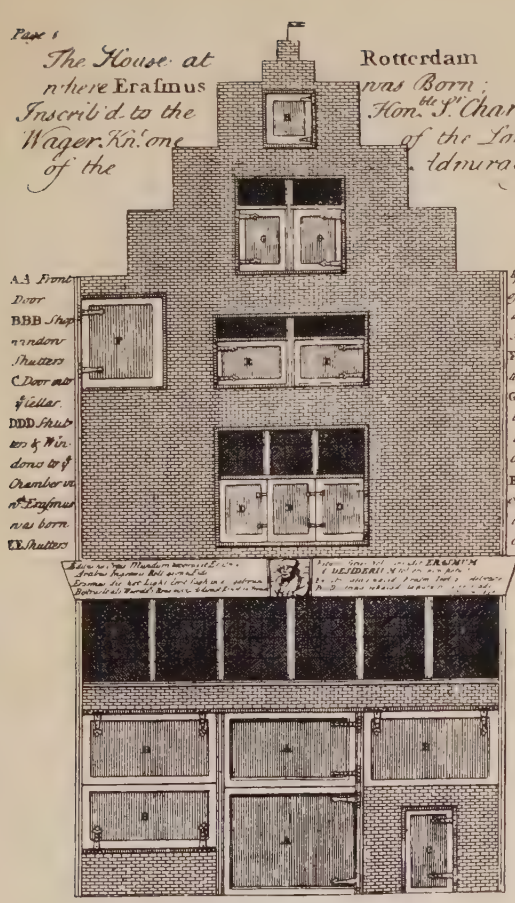
determination to keep out of the cloister, but threw fatal fascination upon the temptation, surrender to which was the occasion of lifelong sorrow. Gerard fled to Rome and gained a livelihood by copying manuscripts—he wrote a beautiful hand—Margarita retired to Rotterdam, where, on 27th October, 1466,[1] Erasmus was born. By the craft of his relatives rumour reached Gerard's ears that Margarita and the child had died; sorrow turning to despair he became a priest. Too late he learned how cruelly he had been deceived—the mother and the babe awaited his return!

Froude regards the story as a legend elaborated and circulated by the monks, who, lending an eager ear to the whispers of scandal-mongers, were ready to fight their opponent with any weapon that served. "It is perhaps a lie altogether; perhaps only partly a lie." We fear there is little evidence in support of the former peradventure. Erasmus never attempted to scotch the ugly rumour, on the contrary he admitted its substantial correctness.

[1] The statue erected to the memory of Erasmus at Rotterdam gives 1467 as the date of birth; the inscription on the tomb at Basel gives 1466, and though the internal evidence of the *Epistles* is not sufficient to set aside all doubt, the balance of testimony is unquestionably in favour of the latter date. According to Beatus Rhenanus the day was the 28th of October, but Erasmus in his *Compendium Vitæ* says it was the 27th. The house in which Erasmus was born is thought to be Wijde Kerkstraat, No. 3, near the church of St. Laurence.

Plate 1

The House at Rotterdam
where Erasmus was Born;
Inscribd to the Hon.ble S.r Charles
Wager Kn.t one of the Lords
of the Admiralty.


A A Front Door
B B B Shop window Shutters
C Door into ye Cellar.
D D D Shutters to ye Windows to ye Chamber in wch Erasmus was born.
E E Shutters
ye Windows of ye Chamber in ye third story
F a Door in to ye Street
G G Shutters to Windows to the Garret
H Shutters of Severals to the upper Garret

He announced also that he was the second child of Margarita, not the first, his brother Peter being sixteen years old, and himself thirteen, when their mother died.

The younger son bore his father's name [1] though he was known in his day, and will always be known, not as Gerard, but as Desiderius Erasmus. Erasmus is the Greek form of the word Gerard ("the well-beloved"), and Desiderius is the same word Latinised. It was an age of classical revival; hence the pet custom of burdening children with high-sounding Greek and Latin names.

Erasmus was a child of four years when he was first sent to school in Gouda, and still of tender age when he served as chorister in the cathedral at Utrecht. Tradition describes him as girl-like for prettiness—flaxen hair, grey-blue eyes, clean-cut features, voice sweet-toned as a silver bell—a veritable angel boy. The description which Erasmus gives in his *Colloquy*, "The Youth's Piety," of

[1] Some scholars incline to the view that the baptismal name was not Gerard, but "Herasmus". They point to the fact that two saints of this name are placed in the Roman Calendar, and note that one of these, St. Erasmus of Campania, a Christian bishop who suffered martyrdom under Diocletian and Maximian, was a popular saint of the day. The suggestion is that the boy was named after this saint, or possibly after one of his father's brothers or some other of his kindred. In the absence of decisive evidence we follow the suggestion first made by Baudius in 1606 and generally accepted.

the devout boy of his time may outline his own demeanour during the chorister and early school days. Two boys are in conversation :—

"Tell me, in what pursuits do you pass the day?"

"I will hold nothing back from a bosom friend like you. Immediately on awakening in the morning (as a rule about six o'clock, sometimes at five) I make with my finger the sign of the cross, touching my forehead and breast."

"And then?"

"Then I open the day in the name of the Father, and the Son, and the Holy Ghost."

"Truly a most pious exercise."

"Afterwards I breathe a brief prayer to Christ."

"What sayest thou to Him?"

"I offer praise for His care throughout the night; I ask that He will further me with His favour all the day long in so far as this may be for my well-being and His own glory, and that He, the true Light that faileth never, the Eternal Sun that quickens, fructifies and strengthens all things, would graciously quicken my soul and preserve me from all evil, so that, led forward by His good hand, I may inherit life everlasting."

"A capital opening to the day."

"When the hour strikes for me to set out for school, I first of all pay my respects to my parents, to whom, next to God, I owe reverence, and then start on my way, taking care, if possible, to order my steps past some church door."

HOUSE WHERE ERASMUS WAS BORN
(AS IT IS TO-DAY)

"How do you act there?"

"I make my obeisance in three words to Jesus and to the saints one and all, male and female, mentioning the Virgin Mother by name, and offering special prayer to the saint under whose peculiar protection I rejoice."

"And what then?"

"I reach school and give my whole mind to the lessons there taught; I entreat Jesus to help me as though everything depended upon His assistance; I work as though my prayer could not be answered unless I studied with all my powers. . . . School over, I speed homewards by way of the church, and again in three words I greet the Saviour. . . . After supper I unbend my mind over a tale or so, and then with a 'good-night' to parents and everybody I betake myself early to rest. . . . Should the day be marred by any special fault, I ask the mercy of Jesus. . . ."

"Do you lie down in any particular way?"

"Well, I never lie on my face or my back, but always on my right side, folding my arms across my breast by way of defence—thus making the figure of a cross — my right hand touching my left shoulder, and *vice versa*, and thus I sleep in peace until I am either aroused or waken of my own accord."

"You are a little prig to act in this way."

"On the contrary, you are a little fool to say so."

Whether Erasmus was the "little prig" or the "little fool" it would be hazardous to affirm.

His first schoolmaster wrote him down a dunce; his second tutor, Sinheim, sub-rector of the school at Deventer, told him to go on as he had begun, for perseverance was bound to carry him to the "topmost pinnacle of learning". Before he was well into his "teens" he had memorised the whole of Horace and Terence. Perhaps it was after hearing one of his Latin exercises that Rudolph Agricola was moved to prophecy, and said, "You will be a great man some day". When the prediction was fulfilled Erasmus did not trace the greatness to his early scholastic training. "What an age was that," he exclaims, "when with great parade of scholarship the stanzas of John à Garland were drilled into youths . . . when a large part of our time was wasted in composing, repeating, or memorising the stupidest verses." One can scarcely believe that things were quite as black as Erasmus paints them. The head-master at Deventer, Alexander Hegius, enjoyed the distinction of knowing something, however little, of the Greek language —a rare attainment in those days—and there is evidence that Erasmus under his tuition not only made rapid strides in his Latin studies, but also laid the foundation of his knowledge of Greek. The school was at this time in a most flourishing condition; one year no fewer than 2,200 scholars

had their names upon the books. The existing Gymnasium claims to represent this ancient institution.

Apart from the gains of scholarship the days at Deventer were not profitless. Young people were educated in the art of manners with a thoroughness worthy of imitation in these days. Book-learning was considered to be a branch of education of secondary moment. Even as

> Aristotle the Philosopher,
> This worthye sayinge writ:
> That manners in a chylde,
> Are more requisit,
> Than playinge on instrumentes
> And other vayne pleasure;
> For virtuous manners,
> Is a most precious treasure.

Accordingly a boy was taught to bear himself like a gentleman, always and everywhere. When he met his superiors he was to lift his cap; when spoken to he was to stand straight, "not titter-totter," he was to look "neither doggedly, surlily, saucily, nor rovingly, but with a staid, modest, pleasant air". When at a feast he must serve himself last of all, and should one of the company so far forget himself as to tell vulgar stories or make obscene jokes he was not on any account to laugh at what had been said, but to keep a stolid countenance as though the jester's words had not been understood.

But school life was not all etiquette and learning. Such games and pastimes as bowls, tennis, striking a ball through an iron ring, hunting, fishing, leaping with a pole, were pleasures in which every healthy Dutch boy indulged. Gambling was reduced to a minimum, but each sport appears to have had its wager.[1] "We must play for something," says one boy to another when planning a game at ball, "we must play for something, or we shall never play our best." "You say true," is the reply. So the terms are settled. "The winner of the first three games shall receive the sixth part of a groat, on condition that all gains shall be divided equally among all the players." In the game of striking a ball through an iron ring the loser has to compose, and repeat extempore, a distich in praise of the winner. The game of bowls is represented as being played by a German and a Frenchman. "It is a mean thing," says one, "to play for money; let's play for our country's good name. If I win, you must shout thrice, 'Let France flourish!' if I lose (and I hope I may not), I will cry out the same words concerning Germany." It is evident that, in the main, the pastimes of schoolboys were helpful, morally and physically, and the girl-like Erasmus, it is to be hoped, enjoyed his full share.

An outbreak of plague brought the four years at

[1] *Familiar Colloquies*, "Various Amusements".

Deventer to a sad close. Margarita, who had made her home near the school so that she might personally attend to the needs of her boy, caught the infection and died; within a few months the father, heart-broken, also passed away leaving his sons to the care of three guardians—their uncle, Peter Winckel, schoolmaster of Gouda; a merchant of Deventer; and a burgher who soon succumbed to the plague.

We have to rely mainly upon Erasmus's word[1] as to the manner in which these gentlemen discharged their stewardship. There was sufficient property in trust, we are told, to provide for the support and education of the orphans. Unhappily the guardians proved unworthy of their charge. The earliest extant letter from the pen of Erasmus, written probably in his fourteenth or fifteenth year, is an exhortation to "Master Peter Winckel" to hasten the settlement of their affairs. "I greatly fear," declares the youth, "that the present term will run out before our business has been concluded, and that at the last minute everything will still require attention. I think, therefore, that no pains nor effort should be spared in the endeavour to guard against loss. You will very likely remark that I am one of those anxious

[1] Letter to *Lambertus Grunnius*, published in the *Opus Epistolarum*, 1529, and the *Compendium Vitæ* in *Vita Erasmi* (Merula), 1607.

souls who alarm themselves lest the heavens should fall. Such things might be said about me, I admit, if there was a full exchequer to go at." When at last the property was disposed of—the most valuable part of the assets would doubtless be the MSS. transcribed by Gerard, the father—the money realised did not find its way into the hands of the orphans, nor was it profitably invested for some future day. The guardians dribbled it all away, and then as a protection against the scandal of exposure laid traps to inveigle the boys into the cloister. As a preliminary step they were placed in a house of "Collationary Brothers" at Bois-le-Duc, a brotherhood whose chief business was the training of young men for the regular orders; threatening, bullying, flogging, being the approved methods of discipline. "They nest themselves everywhere," says Erasmus, "and make a systematic trade of kidnapping boys." These Brethren of the Common Life, the *Fraterherren,* as they were called, differed from other religious communities by taking no vows; their work lay in the copying of religious books; all earnings were thrown into a general fund, and all had things in common. The superior was a brother chosen from among themselves. If the *Imitatio de Christi* was written by Thomas à Kempis, the work reflects honour on the Brethren, to whom à Kempis belonged. When the Order was first originated by Gerard Groot and Florentius Radewin, it met

with severe criticism on the part of the mendicants, but opposition was disarmed as the monks began to realise what powerful allies the *Fraterherren*, if humoured, might easily be.

Two years passed, and the lads returned home more prejudiced against a monastic life than ever. The guardian uncle was specially irritated at their attitude. "It was a matter of boasting with him how many youths he had captured yearly for Francis, or Dominic, or Benedict, or Augustine, or Bridget." To be foiled in his purpose by his own nephews would turn his boasting into shame; besides—whisper softly—the funds were low, and in a year or two the youths, if uncloistered, would step forward to claim their own. One course only lay open; into a monastery the lads must go, if not by fair means, by foul.

The opportunity of a lifetime opened before them, the guardian wheedlingly informed his wards. By a stroke of astonishing fortune he had been successful in obtaining a place for them among the Canons Regular of the Order of St. Augustine in the College of Sion, near Delft. Truly the lines were falling to them in pleasant places! Erasmus was spokesman and made answer, "We are obliged, sir, for this kindness, but we feel that we are as yet too young to take upon ourselves the vows; we do not know our own hearts, nor the cloister, nor the world; our desire is to pursue our studies; in

riper years we can better determine along what path our duty lies".[1] This calm and well-studied rejoinder threw Uncle Winckel into a rage; he called the youth names—a good-for-nothing; a reprobate to whom was reserved the blackness of darkness for ever—it was with difficulty he kept his hands to himself. They must go their own wild and wicked way, he thundered, there was not a copper coin left of all their belongings. Peter, for the moment, wavered; Erasmus was not to be moved. The passion of learning was upon him, the university, not the cloister, was his goal.

But schoolmaster Winckel was as determined as Erasmus. He handed over the case to his co-guardian, a man of gentler manners and softer speech. The boys were invited into the merchant's summer-house and there regaled with wine and cake and honeyed talk. "Many a lie he told of the unspeakable happiness of the monastic life." Peter at length whimpered and gave in; Erasmus stood firm. The guardians returned to the attack with added resolution. The boy, in poor health owing to nervous tension and neglect, was surrounded by a group of friars who alternately

[1] "I have formed a resolution not to contemplate either matrimony or the priesthood or the monastery, or any walk of life out of which I cannot extricate myself until I thoroughly know my own heart." "When will that be?" "Perhaps never. But before one is twenty-eight years old nothing should be determined" (*Familiar Colloquies*, "The Youth's Piety").

threatened and admonished and bribed. "Monks and semi-monks, relatives, both male and female, young and old, known and unknown," everywhere met him. "Some of these," he says, "were by nature such consummate fools that if it had not been for their religious robes, they might have passed muster as clowns." They compared the world to a wind-swept sea, the monastery to a proud ship laughing at the storms. Wonderful tales, too, they had to tell! A wearied traveller seated himself on a serpent which he imagined to be the root of a tree; the serpent devoured him—in like manner the world destroys those who lean upon it. Another traveller, urged to remain at a monastery, turned a deaf ear to entreaty and warning and went on his way; he was eaten up by a lion outside the monastery walls—a similar fate awaits all who are thus sinfully stubborn and self-willed. All was well, on the other hand, with the man who took the vows. Monasticism was profitable unto all things, having promise of the life that now is and of that which is to come. Beset and badgered on every side the poor youth finally succumbed to the wiles of Cornelius Werden, a former schoolmate. Cornelius had entered the cloister of Emmaus at Stein, a district to the east of Gouda, and had become a monastic enthusiast. Knowing Erasmus's love of letters he played his artillery skilfully and powerfully. If he threw in his lot

with them, Cornelius argued, his time would be his own; he might browse in the library the livelong day; he would enjoy intercourse with accomplished friends whose delight it would be to encourage him in all his studies. In the quietness of the monastery he would find "shelter to grow ripe, leisure to grow wise". The youth listened; the stronghold of his opposition was battered down, and at length Erasmus consented to make experiment of Stein—"this garden of the Muses"—when barely seventeen years of age.

CHAPTER II

THE CLOISTER—"ON THE CONTEMPT OF THE WORLD"

ERASMUS had not yet reached that pitch of madness which leads men to put the neck into a halter that can never be removed. He would test himself and the cloister, he said, without committing himself irrevocably and taking the vows. The brethren commended his prudence, humoured and petted him at every turn. They gave him the run of the library, and took care not to disturb him for "Nocturns". In the course of a few months he had succeeded in reading through the principal Latin authors. In what other walk of life could he spend equally delightful days?

But brethren who had donned the cowl did not enjoy such seasons of classical calm, and Erasmus was shrewd enough to mark the contrast. When the vow had been taken would he fare better than they? If not, how could he endure to live? At this time he was in very indifferent health; undisturbed sleep, good food and plenty

of it were necessary if his frail body was not to break down. The smell of fish—the staple food of the monastery—turned him sick. His heart, he used to explain, was Catholic, but his stomach was Protestant. Besides, he had no fondness for the round of ceremonial worship in which the monastic life seemed almost wholly to consist. Brains were at a discount, the brethren did not need them. "In a society of this kind," he writes, "it is the dullards who, as a rule, get to the front, —men, half-fools, who are far more in love with their bellies than with their books. If a man of genius, a born scholar, joins their number, he is kept under lest he attain unto distinction. . . . Just imagine a youth born to the Muses obliged to spend a lifetime among creatures such as these—what a cross it would be! . . . How could such a mind and such a body exist in a monastery? A fish might as happily live in a meadow, or an ox in the sea."

Not relishing his company, Erasmus sought to regain his freedom. "What!" exclaimed the brethren in pious horror, "turn back now? Brand yourself an apostate? provoke St. Augustine to wrath? draw down upon your head the curses of the Order, the scorn of the world?" In vain did the youth struggle, the meshes of the net had been drawn too cleverly around him, and so at last, "with a sickening heart and unready words," the cowl was donned,

"precisely as captives in war offer their hands to the conqueror to be bound".

For monks, as a class, Erasmus entertained, throughout life, the most profound disregard. Their standard of morality, he frequently declared, was the lowest. "A monk's holy obedience consists in—what? In living honestly, chastely, soberly? Not at all. In storing up knowledge, in study and hard work? No, no. A monk may be a glutton, a drunkard, an ignorant, stupid, evil-minded, envious man, but he thus breaks no vow, he is quite within the bounds of his sacred obedience. He only needs to act the slave under a superior as bad as himself, and he is an excellent brother."

This is one side of the monastic shield, the side that was turned to Erasmus in the retrospect of manhood. It must be remembered that there is another and a more pleasant side, and that Erasmus was not always blind to its attractiveness. The treatise, *De Contemptu Mundi* ("On the Contempt of the World"), one of his first attempts at authorship, was written during the nine or ten years at Stein.[1] The monastery, he contends, bestows the

[1] The majority of biographers have allowed only a period of five years at Stein, and accordingly find themselves confronted with a vacuum of several years between the close of the monastic term and the commencement of university life. Mr. Nichols has discovered in Reyner Snoy's preface to a volume of Erasmus's

threefold benediction of freedom and peace and joy. The world offers naught but danger and disappointment. Human life is like the sorrowful sea with its innumerable tempests and perils, its delusive calm. At the best earthly joy is a "bitter sweetness, compassed about with misery". All the glory of the world is vanity. No victory is worthy to be compared with the conquest, which that man achieves who brings into subjection his own heart, and passions and will. Alexander himself, the proud conqueror of nations, would bear witness to this truth if only he could return.

There is no reason why this essay should not be taken seriously as a faithful record of the mental attitude of Erasmus at this time. The word "inconsistency" need not alarm us. Having committed himself, though reluctantly, to the life of the cloister, his first and healthiest impulse was to make the best of his calling.

> There is some sort of goodness in things evil,
> Would men observingly distil it out.

Herein lies the chief value of the *De Contemptu Mundi*. Placed alongside the later writings of Erasmus it is clearly, from a literary point of view, the work of a 'prentice hand. But this is not the

Juvenile Poems (*Silva Carminum Herasmi*, Gouda, 1513) a statement to the effect that Erasmus and William Hermann were comrades for ten years in the Convent of Stein.

standpoint from which to regard it. We must view it rather as a chapter in autobiography, the effort of an eager mind to reconcile itself to the inevitable, the endeavour not to be disobedient to the monastic ideal.

To complete the round of his literary experiments Erasmus attempted versification as well as prose. During schooldays at Deventer he had written a poem which is to be found in his *Carmen Bucolicum,* and when still "quite a boy" a rhyme in praise of Anna, the grandmother of Jesus. Other verses belonging to this period are a poem against Delius—"an impromptu piece, not worth reading, unless once and rapidly"—some "trifling lines" on the birthplace of Jesus, a poem on Spring—a monument of the friendship between himself and Hermann, the couplets being written by them alternately—and the *Ad Lesbium de Nummo,* which finds a place in Reyner Snoy's edition of the *Juvenile Poems,* 1513. Mention is made by Erasmus, in his *Catalogue of Lucubrations,* of an elegiac poem on Lust and Ambition written in his eighteenth year, but these verses have not come down to us. "The pieces that have been happily lost or spirited away," he writes, "we will leave where they are, and according to the proverb, 'Let sleeping dogs lie'." A priest, hearing of his poetical pains, asked the favour of an ode in praise of the archangel Michael, after whom his church was named.

The good man returned the poem, with the price of a bottle of wine and the prettily dubious compliment that he dared not post it on the walls of the church, because it was so poetical in form that men would mistake it for Greek !

The friendship which Erasmus formed with William Hermann, of Gouda, himself a poet of repute, was one of the deepest pleasures of these days. There was scarcely a volume of the Latin authors which they did not study together. In defiance of the dictum of Aristotle that absence dissolves friendship, they remained true to each other when the days of separation came. "Greeting to you, my only joy!" writes Erasmus. "Allow me to congratulate you on your present position—that is, if you yourself regard it with pleasure; and verily you ought so to do, for sure I am that you have made advance towards fame. . . . I shall die unless you put life into me by frequent epistles. . . . The one quarrel I have with you is that you write so briefly and so seldom. Ah me! am I to conclude that you cannot deny yourself of one night's sleep for the sake of your friend? . . . Would that I could live with you, or you with me! You will never know how consumed I am with the desire for you and for you alone. I have settled it in my own mind that you are a kind of enchanter, for I would prefer to spend life in your company than with 'His Eminence' himself."

A kind of Platonic affection appears also to have sprung up at this time between Erasmus and Servatius Rogerus, one of the younger brethren, who ultimately became Prior of Stein. A number of letters passed between them, those written by Erasmus breathing the most love-sick sentiments, and if these were collected in pamphlet form the modern thirst for this class of literature would surely be assuaged. "I should write more frequently to you, very dearest Servatius, if I knew for certain that you would not be more fatigued by reading my letters than I by writing them. And your comfort is so dear to me, that I had rather be tortured by what gives you rest, than fatigue you by what gives me pleasure. . . . So suspicious are those that love, I sometimes seem to see, I know not what—that you do not often think of me, or have even quite forgotten me. My wish would be, if it were possible, that you should care for me as much as I do for you, and be as much pained by the love of me, as I am continually tormented by the want of you. . . . You are dearer to me than these eyes, than this soul, than this self. . . . When you are away, nothing is sweet to me; in your presence I care for nothing else. When I see you happy, I forget my own sorrows; if anything painful has occurred to you, so help me, Heaven, if my pain is not greater than your own. . . . These few days

that I have been deprived of your society have seemed to me longer than a whole year. I have suffered such sorrow, been tormented with such regrets, that I have sometimes prayed to be relieved from a life that I hated. . . . Farewell, only hope of my life." [1]

It is charitable to regard these effusions as literary exercises written not because of a morbid love-sickness, but for the sake of the acquisition of style. We know how Erasmus in his earlier years laboured with his pen. In his preface to the *De conscribendis Epistolis* he says, "As a boy, and also in middle life, I wrote a great quantity of letters, but scarcely any with a view to publication. I practised my pen, I passed away my time, I had rare fun with my acquaintance, I indulged my humour, in short did nothing but train and please myself, and had not the ghost of an idea that friends would care to keep and to transcribe such frivolous scribblings." It is clear also that Erasmus was not, in the afore-quoted letters, so much a lover as an enthusiastic student, and that his main anxiety was to arouse in the minds of his correspondents a passion for literature. He could write sharply even to his own dearest Servatius when rebuke was needed. "I am every day, my Servatius, more surprised at your quiescence, not

[1] F. M. Nichols, *The Epistles of Erasmus*, Excerpts from Nos. 6, 7, 9.

to say indolence, and cannot admire a man, who having all the conveniences of study at command, does not care to supply the only thing that is wanting, a little pains. . . . It will be worth your while to share your mind with me, and not to be ashamed of asking a question about anything you doubt, or confessing anything you do not know. It will also conduce greatly to your object if you will write to me more frequently than you do ; but do not write in your old way with borrowed sentences, or even what is worse, heaping up expressions, here out of Bernard and there out of Claudian, and fitting them or rather unfitly sewing them on to your own, as a crow might do with a peacock's feathers. . . . Shake off your torpor, cast off the coward and put on the man and set your hand even at this late hour to the work ! Only look what a long time has slipped through our fingers, as they say. Four years have gone by, while you still stick in the same rut, whereas if you had followed our advice at the first, you would by this time have come out such a man as might not only equal us in literature but instruct us in return." [1]

The same note is struck in letters to Francis Theodorik, and Sasbound, also younger brethren at Stein. "Show yourself a man, and shake off all feebleness of mind. In this way you will do what

[1] F. M. Nichols, *The Epistles of Erasmus*, pp. 51, 52.

is best for yourself, and make me, your most loving friend, happy. . . . While your age is still unwasted, take the ant for an example, and exert yourself to prepare the materials which may delight and feed your age." It appears that Sasbound instructed Erasmus in the art of painting, and there is a long-standing report to the effect that in the cabinet of Cornelius Musius, Provost of the Convent of St. Agatha at Delft, there was a picture of Christ on the Cross, painted by Erasmus when he was at Stein.

The authors most prized during these formative years were Jerome, whose *Epistles* Erasmus copied out with his own hand, and Laurentius Valla, an abridgment having been made of his work, the *Elegantiæ*, as early as 1485. A letter addressed to Cornelius Aurotinus, a friend who had written in somewhat derogatory terms respecting Erasmus's idol, provides an interesting specimen of literary hero-worship and championship.

> "As wolves and lambs are born to disagree,
> A fatal discord severs you and me!

"If you are wise, you will at once make friends with my Laurentius, or you must understand that war is declared. You ask, whence this sudden stir, as if you had forgotten what foul and deadly reproaches you uttered against him, when you were lately with us. I shudder when I recall the shamelessness of your language. The man who is

eloquent above all others, the man who has been rightly called the marrow of Persuasion, you venture to describe as 'a Croaking Crow, a jester and not an orator'. If he still lived what a drubbing you might expect! You remember only too well that the dead do not bite, and think it safe to do or say what you like against him. Not quite so safe, I tell you to check your triumph; you see in me the avenger of Laurentius's wrongs. Though I am careless of injuries done to myself, you may find how pugnacious I am in defending my literary friends. If you want assistance, you may send for your hero Engelbert [a grammarian], who according to you has so drunk of the Castalian waters that nothing comes away from him but poetry—and for others like him, of whom there is everywhere a safe abundance. Neither need you suppose that I shall lack my band of warriors; for this quarrel belongs not only to me, but to all friends of sound scholarship; for in striking Laurentius you have wounded all men of letters." [1]

A story relating to this period has been handed down which, if true, is far from creditable to the chief actor in the play.

In the monastery garden grew a pear tree, the fruit of which was regarded as the privileged possession of the superior. Erasmus, youth-like,

[1] F. M. Nichols, *The Epistles of Erasmus*, p. 72.

climbed the tree early one morning and set himself the task of lightening the branches. While thus delightfully busy the abbot chanced to draw near; sliding down the tree-trunk, Erasmus made for the house, hobbling as he went, in imitation of the gait of a brother who was lame. Next day, when all were assembled, the cripple was charged with the theft, and rebuked. The monk, astonished, humiliated, indignantly repelled the accusation. The abbot, convinced of his guilt—had he not with his own eyes seen him shuffle along the garden path?—only added to his penance on the denial being made. It was bad to steal pears, it was worse to lie. We cannot think that Erasmus carried the pleasantry to extremes and actually suffered another to bear the punishment of his own transgression.

Thus passed the years at Stein, not without their pleasures and diversions. But the youth, ardent and restless, began to strain like a greyhound at the slips. The consciousness of the fact that vows were upon him worked like poison in his veins. In the essay "On the Contempt of the World" he had done his best to persuade himself that the monastery was the home of freedom, but stubborn fact untwisted his arguments. Bands, cords, shackles of iron; these, he found, were the true metaphors in the light of which the obedience of the priesthood was to be interpreted. Other men might suffer themselves to be stifled and fettered; he was

a child of the open air. The breath of his life was freedom. Dependence, even when it was voluntary, was a burden to him. He desired simply to be his own superior, to go his way unhampered by the restrictions inseparable from life in a community. Fortune was kind. The Bishop of Cambrai, in want of a secretary, and having taken a fancy to Erasmus, asked the Pope to liberate him so that he might accompany him on tour to Italy. A Latin scholar would be of service to him in many ways. The vow could not be rendered null and void, but a dispensation for non-residence might be obtained if all parties were agreed. The Pope graciously granted the favour; the Bishop of the Diocese and the Prior of Stein were pleased to approve. Thus it came to pass that Erasmus exchanged the "cloister'd cell" for the "wrangling mart" of the world.

CHAPTER III

PARIS UNIVERSITY—TOURNEHENS

THE project of the Bishop of Cambrai, Henry of Bergen, fell through for the most sufficient of reasons, lack of money. To allay the disappointment, as far as Erasmus was concerned, it was decided that he should go to Paris, after ordination,[1] and prosecute his studies at the university. The Bishop, with great kindness, furnished funds for the journey, and promised to provide a regular pension. It was no unusual thing for scholars of the Renaissance to live in dependence upon wealthy patrons. This relation, as Dr. Emerton points out, was one of honour not to be reduced to commercial terms. "The money given

[1] The ordination of Erasmus by the Bishop of Utrecht took place on 25th April, 1492. In 1517 a special Papal dispensation was obtained in order to render the ordination ecclesiastically valid. The proceedings of 25th April, 1492, were strictly uncanonical owing to the circumstances of his birth.

was not paid for the scholar's services ; it was given to secure him the leisure needed for the proper pursuit of his own scholarly aims. It bound him only to diligence in pure scholarship, not to a servile flattery of his patron, nor to any direct furtherance of the patron's ends."

Erasmus was fully twenty-five years of age when he took up residence at the Paris University. The Collège Montaigu, into which he entered, was then presided over by John Standonch, under whose Principalship it had become famous as a house for students of limited means. Master Standonch himself had borne the yoke in youth. Report said that he had kept himself at the university by acting as servant in the house of St. Geneviève, and that his zeal for knowledge was such that he would frequently climb the church steeple at night-time so that he might pursue his studies by the kindly light of the moon.

Erasmus was one of eighty-four students whom Standonch lodged and boarded. "The University of Paris was at this time one of the most renowned schools in Europe. Nevertheless, very little had been accomplished there for the revival of letters or the promotion of liberal studies. Rhetoric—which was understood to include the study of the classical writers, as well as the art of graceful composition—having been long almost entirely neglected, had for some years past been respectably represented

by Robert Gaguin, the author of a history of France, and a man not indeed of very profound learning, nor by any means perfect as a writer of Latin, but of elevated mind and noble character. Since 1458 there had been a Greek chair, and the first professor, Gregory of Tiferno, was now replaced by George Hermonymus of Sparta, according to Erasmus, a most incompetent teacher. ('He could not have taught Greek if he would, nor would he if he could.') In 1489, just two or three years before the arrival of Erasmus in Paris, three foreigners, Faustus Andrelinus, Jerome Balbus and Cornelius Vitellius requested permission to give lessons in *belles lettres*, and obtained it, with the restriction, however, suggested by the jealousy of the scholastics, that it should be for one hour only in the evening. . . . On the other hand, the scholastic philosophy still reigned supreme, as it had done for upwards of two hundred years. The Nominalists, who must be regarded as representing in that age the freer side of speculation, having been proscribed for some time by Louis XI., though again permitted to teach, did not enjoy much influence. The Realists in their two divisions of Thomists and Scotists —the followers of St. Thomas Aquinas and the followers of Duns Scotus—filled the schools."[1] The Collège Montaigu was the principal seat of the

[1] R. B. Drummond's *Life of Erasmus*, vol. i., pp. 33, 34.

Scotist philosophy. The quibbles of scholasticism would therefore be Erasmus's daily food. "I am buried so deep in 'Scotus,'" writes Erasmus, "that Stentor could not wake me. 'Wake me!' you say. 'Why you must be awake, or you could not be writing a letter!' Hush! you do not understand the theological slumber. You can write letters in it. You can debauch yourself and get drunk in it. I used to think that the story of Epimenides was a fable. I know better now. Epimenides lived to extreme old age. His skin, when he died, was found inscribed with curious characters. It is said to be preserved in Paris in the Sorbonne, that sacred shrine of Scotist divinity, and to be as great a treasure there as the Sibyl's book at Rome. Epimenides was a Scotist theologian, or perhaps he was Scotus himself. He composed mysteries which, as he was not a prophet, he could not himself understand. The Sorbonne doctors consult the skin when their syllogisms fail them. No one, however, may venture to look in it till he is a master of fifteen years' standing. If younger men try they become blind as moles.

"Epimenides went out walking one day. He missed his way and wandered into a cave, which struck him as a quiet place for thinking. Even doctors of divinity do now and then wander. He sat down, he gnawed his nails, he turned over in his mind his instances, his quiddities and his quod-

dities. He dropped asleep, and so remained for forty-seven years. Happy Epimenides that he woke at last! Some divines never wake at all and fancy themselves most alive when their slumber is deepest. When he came to himself he was in a changed world. The mouth of the cave was overhung with moss. Landscape, town, streets, houses, inhabitants, dress, language, all were altered; so fast mortal things pass on. He had been dreaming all the while, dreaming Scotist theology and nothing else. Scotus was Epimenides *redivivus,* and now you may fancy your friend Erasmus sitting among his accursed volumes, yawning, knitting his brows, eyes staring into vacancy. They say Scotist theology cannot be understood by disciples of the Muses and the Graces. You must first forget what you have learnt elsewhere. You must vomit up the nectar which you have drunk on Helicon. I do my best. I speak bad Latin. I never use a neat expression. I never risk a jest. I am getting on. They will take Erasmus for one of themselves by-and-by. You ask what all this means. It means that when you see me next you will find nothing left of your old acquaintance. Do not mistake me. Theology itself I reverence and always have reverenced. I am speaking merely of the theologastrics of our own time, whose brains are the rottenest, intellects the dullest, doctrines the thorniest, manners the brutalest, life the foulest, speech the

spitefulest, hearts the blackest that I have ever encountered in the world." [1]

This lively epistle was addressed to one Thomas Grey, the son, it has been mistakenly supposed, of the Marquis of Dorset and uncle of Lady Jane, who, along with the eldest son of Lord Mountjoy, and Robert Fisher, a cousin of John Fisher, Bishop of Rochester, and others, enjoyed Erasmus's friendship and "coaching" during university days. Tuition was an agreeable method of eking out the uncertain benefactions of the Bishop of Cambrai, who, we are told, was excellent at plighting his word and tardy in fulfilling it. Thus Erasmus became the centre of an admiring literary circle, the members of which regarded him as an authority on all subjects classical. A letter addressed to Christianus of Lubeck gives wholesome advice to students of every age. "There is nothing more harmful than to be satiated with anything, even with learning. Therefore undue eagerness is to be restrained and diversions are to be intermixed, providing, of course, they are always such as become a gentleman and a student. . . . Nay, one ought to experience a perpetual delight in study itself so that it may be to us more of a pastime than of a toil. . . . It is sheer folly to learn things that must be unlearned. . . . It is of little moment how much you learn, it is of vital

[1] Ep. LXXXV. as abridged by Froude, *Erasmus*, pp. 74-75.

importance how well you learn. . . . Be methodical. . . . Divide the day into tasks. . . . Give heed to your tutor. . . . Fix notable sayings in your memory and commit them to writing, the faithful keeper of words. . . . Take care lest you have a study lined with learned volumes while you yourself remain an ignoramus. . . . Set apart seasons for meditation. . . . If you are in doubt concerning any matter, never be ashamed to put a question; if you fall into error never blush at being put right. Avoid the temptation of burning the midnight oil if you would keep wit alive and maintain your health. The Muses love the morning, and that is the proper time for study. . . . Ponder also upon this, that there is nothing more fleeting than youth, which, once gone, can never be recalled. But now I begin to be an exhorter when I promised to be a counsellor."

This letter, built on sermonic lines, may have embodied the substance of one of his hitherto undiscovered discourses. "Many things have been destroyed which I had no wish to preserve," he writes, thirty years later. "But it would please me if I learned that some of the sermons preached by me at Paris during my term at the Collège Montaigu were extant to-day."

Judging from the realistic picture of "Vinegar College" (Montaigu) which Erasmus sketched in his *Colloquy*, "Ichthyophagia," or, "Fish-diet," uni-

versity life was not the blissful experience he had conjured up in his dreams. The beds were so hard, the food so coarse and so scanty, vigils and work so exacting, that many youths of genius were, within a year, laid upon their deathbeds, while others were made blind or leprous or mad. During winter a morsel of bread was doled out to them, and water for drinking purposes had to be drawn out of an infected well. Erasmus refuses to dilate upon the merciless whippings that were administered or upon the rotten eggs and sour wine that had to be consumed. Many young men of his acquaintance, he affirms, contracted maladies that remained with them till their dying day. Cowls of coarse brown cloth were worn by the boarders, and earned for them the title of "Les pauvres Capettes de Montaigu".

Erasmus was careful that the shoe should not pinch him as tightly as it did many of his fellow-students. He fell ill and returned for a time to Cambrai. "I have had an alarming sickness. . . . What is our life and how dark are the threads we must needs use in the weaving! . . . I have lost all the love I had for the world and my ambitions are to me as nothing; I crave that sacred stillness which will afford me leisure to live wholly unto God, to study the Holy Scriptures and to repent in tears my past transgressions." On resuming his studies he indulged in an annual excursion into

Holland, and contemplated seriously the postponed Italian tour so that he might win the coveted "*doctus*" degree. In his heart of hearts he despised this academic distinction, but recognised how necessary it was for a scholar to obtain some such title if he would exert his fullest influence in the world. "Horace speaks truly when he says that no one can get himself a new brain by taking a voyage across the sea, nor can he become one whit the more learned by placing some appendage to his name; but one must needs condescend to the vagaries of the day, and remember that not the common people alone, but even men of superior culture imagine that no one can be truly learned unless he is styled '*magister noster*,' though Christ Himself, the Chief of the theologians, forbids the use of such a phrase. In days past it was not possible for a man to purchase a degree, he had to earn it by issuing books that proved him to be a doctor indeed."

The thought of an Italian tour had again to be abandoned; a visit to Tournehens, on the frontier of Artois, was the only travelling pleasure that could at present be arranged. His friend, James Battus (formerly Secretary of Bergen, North Brabant), "the simplest and most affectionate soul in the world," had the ear of the wealthy Marchioness de Veere, of Tournehens, to whose son, Adolphus, he acted as tutor. The Bishop of Cambrai's promised

pension had failed, and Erasmus had to seek other and more powerful friends. Hence the humiliating correspondence which preceded the visit, and the frequent injunctions that his "dear Battus" should bestir himself and frame on the behalf of his friend "seductive petitions," taking care always to seize the psychological moment for their presentation. The attitude of Erasmus is that of a desperate suitor whose dignity has been thrown to the winds. At these moments the man stands out in one of his least attractive aspects; self-respect is played with fast and loose, in a manner truly distressing. "I will set things in order here, tie up my manuscripts and arrange my affairs. In the meanwhile you will transcribe what I forward. Send me word by the boy who, it is said, will shortly arrive here for study, exactly how matters stand; then, when you have copied the Laurentius, send it by the same messenger—I mean Adrian—who will bring back, not only the Laurentius, but also the necessary for my expenses and a note conveying a formal invitation; and see to it that the sum be worthy of my acceptance. It is not possible for me to meet my own expenses for I am literally a pauper; nor ought I to do so even if I could, because I cannot come without surrendering a capital position I now hold. And further, I wish you would send me a better horse, if you possibly can. I do not ask for a grand Bucephalus, but one that a man may bestride with

self-respect; and you know that I require two steeds, for I have made up my mind to bring my man; the second horse, therefore, I want for the groom. You will easily convince my lady of these things. You could not have a better case, and indeed your eloquence is such that you can turn the worst case into the best. Should she refuse to do this, how, I pray you, can she be looked to for a pension, she who grudges to discharge a petty travelling bill?" The lady, it seems, was not easily persuaded, so an attempt was made to force open the door of her sympathies, the most easily swung door of a woman's heart. "Point out that I make complaint in my letters of suffering from a like affliction as that which troubled Jerome, *viz.*, loss of eyesight, and that the prospect before me is of being compelled to study, as Jerome used to do, with ears and tongue alone. Coax her with the neatest words you can command into sending me a sapphire or some other gem that is good for weak eyes. I would myself have sent her word what stones have this power, if only my Pliny had been by me; search out the matter for yourself with the aid of a medical man." Erasmus became an adept at such epistles; to the close of life his hand retained its cunning, and if the writing of these appeals cut his spirit to the quick, he succeeded in a remarkable manner in hiding the confusion of his face. He was not the man to be thwarted in his life's purpose

by squeamish considerations of propriety. "You can be a little more pushing in your friend's cause," he writes, "without offending my modesty." The one reflection that lifted his head was the thought that much as patrons might give, more would be returned. He spoke of immortalising them by the books he had in him to write. "I am busy with *MSS.* that will live for ever. . . . The books I am writing will be read in every land." What was money to fame? Future ages should know his Mæcenas, and hold the name of his good genius in honourable remembrance. Could wealth be devoted to a better end?

It is refreshing to find Erasmus stretching himself to his full height now and again, even in the "familiar" correspondence with Battus. One of his letters of entreaty had not pleased his learned friend; its tone had been too informal and assumptive; Erasmus had penned it standing upon his feet instead of crouching on his knees. "It ill befits a man in sore straits," he writes to Battus in extenuation and mock contrition, "to affect pleasantry, or to indulge himself in cavil or melancholia, when he approaches one who basks in the brightest smiles of Fortune, and to whom he is indebted for many things. Moreover, I am well aware that it is recognised as the proper thing at Court, when it is your lot to come into contact with those poor unfortunates whom you have enslaved by some

little favour or other, not only to shut your ears to all complaints, but hardly to heed the most modest request, while you look for overflowing gratitude even from those whom you have answered with a knock-down blow. But just as men in certain illnesses lose themselves and swoon away, so I, being greatly afflicted, lost sight of the fact of my utter helplessness and need. It was a fond imagination of mine that Erasmus had no occasion to bridle his tongue when speaking with Battus. To this hour I have only loved you—shall I not confess it?—I have not feared you, for you know that perfect love and fear do not stand together. It is plain that my love has been blind and that it has led me beyond bounds. I see wherein I have erred, and if I do not mend my manners I will endure the severest penalty. Henceforth I will love my Battus as a friend, as a patron, as a scholar. I will do obeisance to him as my master, my king, as one who has it in his power either to make me or to mar me. I will bide a good thrashing if you discover in any letter of mine from this day—I will not say rudeness or abuse—but a single word that is not courteous or cringing or that does not become a slave whom Death stares in the face. In fine, let me thank you, as my patron, for bringing me to my senses and causing me again to realise my condition."

Occasionally Erasmus played the part of suitor

with consummate grace and dignity. "My love for you is so great," he writes to Nicolas of Burgundy, "that measured by it even a long letter would be short indeed; but my occupations are so pressing as to make a short letter long. The ancients used to call a poet or an eloquent person a swan, an allegory not without meaning. The one was spotless in plumage, the other candid in heart; both were sacred to Phœbus; both delighted in limpid streams and well-watered meadows; both were given to song. But nowadays, and especially in our climate, both seem to have become mute, and even the approach of death does not make them vocal. The reason is, as I think physiologists would tell us, that the swan does not sing except under the breath of Favonius; and can we wonder at all swans being mute, when we have so many gales from the North and East, and no Zephyrs at all. As for me, that British Aquilo so took my voice away when he took my money,[1] that a wolf, catching sight of me first, could not have done it more effectually. But Zephyrs breathe only on the approach of spring. Wherefore, if you, kind Provost, will be the spring of my patroness, the lady of Veer, and she breathe on me as Favonius, I will be to both of you so tuneful a swan, that even posterity shall hear my singing. I need not explain

[1] *Vide* p. 58.

the riddle, as I write to an Œdipus, not a Davus. Do you only, as you promised, be as good to me as another Battus, and use your influence for a while with my lady. Farewell." [1]

The journey to my lady of Tournehens was undertaken in the winter of 1497 or 1498. According to Erasmus travellers never faced weather so unkind; for three days the sun was hidden. "Juno, who hates poets, called in Œolus to help her, and Œolus beat down upon us with hail and snow and rain and wind and fog, now one, now all together. . . . Some of the old country folk declared they had never witnessed such weather before. Our horses had to plough their way now through snow-banks, now through prickles sharpened with ice, and again over ice-layers on the snow, too weak to bear their weight, but sufficiently razor-like to wound their feet. . . . When at last the castle hove in sight, we discovered ice, ice, everywhere. . . . So wild was the wind that many a man was blown down that day and killed; and it blew full at our backs. Accordingly I began to slide down the hillside as on a sheet of ice, using my staff as a rudder to guide me—the new navigation! We went all the way without meeting a single soul. . . . The sorrows of the way were not without their compensation, as we stood in less fear of being

[1] F. M. Nichols, *The Epistles of Erasmus*, p. 293.

set upon by robbers. Still all fear on this head was not cast out, as you will understand in the case of such men of wealth as we!"

The Lady Veere's surpassing graciousness more than compensated for the tempestuous time. "Never did Nature produce a being more modest or clever or good." One would have thought that the fascination of his "Anna Bersala" would have held him at the castle a lengthened period, but he remained only two or three days, making his lady's mansion an inn *en route* for Holland, whither he hastened, bent upon recovering what portion he might of his wasted inheritance. Nothing was gained, and shortly afterwards he returned to Paris, dispirited and troubled. Scandal was being bandied from lip to lip. Even so close a friend as William of Gouda confessed that things were being said of him that he, for one, did not like to hear, and he urged Erasmus to vindicate himself. "I do not much care," Erasmus replies, "what people may say of me, but I do care what you think of me. . . . Do you want to know how Erasmus spends his days here? . . . My life is one of unspeakable wretchedness, I am eaten away by sorrow, hemmed in on every side by schemesters, forsaken by friends, made the sport of Fortune. Yet I am keeping myself unspotted from the world. You may scarcely credit my words. You may have before your mind's eye a picture of the Erasmus of long ago. . . . But I

am now no frivolous bacchanalian, rather am I one of those mournful, tearful beings who is out of love with himself, finding no pleasure at all in life, and who at the same time is not permitted to die."

Invitation to England came from his pupil Mountjoy, and at once the weeper exchanged the spirit of heaviness for the garment of praise. "Is there a place," writes Erasmus, "where I would not follow a youth of such culture and gentleness and winsomeness? I would follow him . . . even into hell!"

CHAPTER IV

FIRST VISIT TO ENGLAND

AS might be expected, Erasmus, on reaching England in the summer of 1499, turned his face at the earliest moment towards the universities. Rooms were secured at Oxford in the College of St. Mary, of the Order of Augustinian Canons, whose prior at this time was one Richard Charnock. The fame of Erasmus had preceded him, as is evident from the greeting which John Colet addressed to him on his arrival in the city. "My friend Broome has sent me a letter in which he sings your praises. . . . During my stay at Paris, you were highly spoken of amongst the learned. An epistle of yours, the one to Gaguin, in which you refer in glowing terms to the labour and genius involved in the production of his *French History*, supplied me, when I read it, with sufficient proof that you were a man of culture, versed in literature and in many other things besides. But that which forms your chief recommendation to me is the word of the Reverend Father, whose guest you are, the Prior of the House and Church of Jesus Christ,

who said to me yesterday that he believed you to be a man of singular goodness. . . . When we meet, it will be necessary for me to recommend myself to you and to your wisdom, in the same way as others, with less propriety, have recommended you to me. For it is seeming that the less should be recommended to the greater, and the unlearned to the learned. But if there is anything in which one so humble as I can be of service to you, the help sought shall be as heartily rendered as your genius demands. I am glad you have touched our shores, and trust that our England will prove herself as kind to you as I am well assured you will, by your erudition, prove to be of service to her."

This courteous and warm welcome was not an isolated greeting. The stranger was received on every side with marks of esteem, and appears to have been genuinely delighted alike with his friends and his surroundings. A letter written to a former teacher at Paris, Faustus Andrelinus, shows us Erasmus in one of his most hilarious moods, and—*mirabile dictu*—thoroughly contented in his lot. "How am I getting on? First rate. . . . If you only knew the pleasures of Britain you would at once take wings and fly hither; in case your gout made this impossible, you would ask to be transformed into a Dædalus. See, I will refer to one thing out of many—the ladies

here are simply divine, altogether lovely and irresistible; more to be desired are they than the Muses at whose shrine you kneel. Besides, there is a custom here in vogue which cannot be over-praised. Visitors are greeted with a kiss. It is thus you are saluted on arrival, it is thus leave is taken of you at your going; should you return —kisses! Go where you may you find kisses—kisses everywhere! And if you once had the flavour of them, Faustus, you would want to stay in England, not like Solon for a brief ten years, but for the remainder of your days." One cannot wonder if there was so much coming and going in those days that young men scarce found leisure to eat.

"You will wish to know what I think of this England of yours," writes Erasmus to one of his pupils, Robert Fisher, then sojourning in Italy. "If you have ever taken my word on any matter, my dear Robert, believe me when I say that I have not yet found its equal. The climate is agreeable and healthful, and the scholarship of its learned men is not in the least peddling or shallow, but profound and exact and wide, embracing both Latin and Greek authors. These things have taken the heat out of my desire for Italy, and I now only care to go in order to see what is to be seen. When I sit at the feet of my friend Colet it seems to me that I am hearkening to Plato

himself. Can any one fail to be impressed by Grocyn's immense erudition? Is it possible to find a mind so acute and original as Linacre's? Has Nature ever produced a spirit gentler and more lovable, a man of larger mould than Thomas More?"

The circle in which Erasmus found himself was a remarkable one. The head of his college, Richard Charnock, was not a prior of the orthodox type, self-assertive, ignorant, lazy, but a man of culture and refinement. Thomas Linacre, better known by the position he held in later life as physician to Henry VIII., and William Grocyn belonged to the small and select band of Greek scholars who were destined to work a revolution in the world of letters. Thomas More, the famous Lord Chancellor, was then a law student of some twenty-one years of age, already held in repute for his brilliant conversational powers. The occasion of the young lawyer's first meeting with Erasmus —we follow the popular tradition—was at a dinner party when a discussion ensued, in the course of which the two wits, ignorant of each other's identity, joined issue. At length Erasmus turned to his opponent and cried out, "Thou art either More or nobody," a sally which provoked the quick retort, "Thou art either Erasmus or the devil".

But the man of power at Oxford during this

QUEEN'S COLLEGE, CAMBRIDGE

period was John Colet, "Plato himself". It is questionable whether Colet's chief title to fame was the work he afterwards accomplished as Dean of St. Paul's and founder of St. Paul's School, great as this work was, or the lectureship he instituted at Oxford on the Epistles of Paul. His sentences were arrows "surer than the arrows of Hercules". It must have been exciting to watch the archer draw his mighty bow. Even at this day, when reading his lectures in cold print, we can hear the twang of the string and the whiz of the arrow as it speeds through the air. The schoolmen were the mark against which he directed his keenest shafts. "They divide the Scripture into four senses, the literal, the tropological, the allegorical and the analogical—the literal sense has become nothing at all."[1] In his lectures on the Epistle to the Romans, and on the 1st Epistle to the Corinthians, Colet made brave attempts to set aside sophistry and to bring out the direct meaning of the text. "Twenty doctors expound one text twenty ways, and with an anti-theme of half an inch some of them draw a thread of nine days long." True, these scholastic divines professed

[1] Litera gesta docet, quid credas Allegoria,
Tropologia quid agas, quid speres Analogia.

The literal sense teaches the facts; the allegorical tells what men are to believe; the tropological what they are to do; the analogical what they are to hope.

to embrace in their system the entire range of universal knowledge, but at best their teaching was "a huge and bewildering mass of dreary and lifeless subtlety". Colet's exposure of the methods and aims of the schoolmen, and his plea for the application of sane canons of interpretation in matters Biblical, aroused Christian humanists everywhere to enthusiasm. Erasmus was proud to sit at his feet, as also were doctors of theology and of law, abbots and persons of rank. Old men did not think it beneath their dignity to learn of a younger man, and doctors from one who did not wear a degree. In later life the degree of Doctor of Divinity was offered to him and accepted, not because he valued the title, but because pleasure was thereby given to his friends.

Unbounded as was the admiration of the young Dutch scholar for his friend, he ventured, on occasion, to enter into disputation. The letter, *Disputatiuncula de tædio, pavore, tristitia Jesu, instante supplicio crucis, etc.*, is really a treatise in which Erasmus traces the agony of Jesus in the garden and His prayer that the cup might, if possible, pass from Him, to the instinctive shrinking of the human heart from death. Colet held that Jesus could not have been so inconsistent as to desire escape from that death the experience of which He had come into the world expressly to endure; nor could it be imagined, he argued, that Jesus

would prove to be less heroic than martyrs who had welcomed with gladness the cross and the flames. The thesis which Erasmus developed was an anticipation of present-day teaching on the Kenôsis, how that our Lord in His incarnation assumed all those imperfections which are inseparable from a true human life, the consequences of Adam's transgression, though not sinful in themselves; such experiences, for example, as hunger and thirst and weariness and the fear of death. Colet's reference to the martyrs was met by the argument that these suffering and triumphant saints were upheld by a fortitude which was not their own but the gift of Christ according to promise, whereas our Lord in face of the Cross, of His own free will, emptied Himself of His Divinity and suffered as unaided man. "It was fitting that that death which was paid for so many deaths should be as bitter as possible, seeing that by it the sins of the whole world were expiated."

But the friends knew how to dispute after a less serious manner. One evening the talk at Prior Charnock's table veered round to the story of Cain's sacrifice and the reason of the Divine disfavour. Colet maintained that Cain's sin lay in his distrust of God and in reliance upon his own strength and industry. Abel kept his sheep, content to receive what God by the products of the soil was pleased to bestow. The other guests took a different view,

but, admits Erasmus, "he, single-handed, got the better of us all". In order to enliven matters—the discussion had taken too serious a turn for a dinner-table—Erasmus improvised a legend which he professed to have discovered in the pages of an old and musty manuscript. They could believe the story—if they liked.

It was about Cain's avariciousness. He knew what astonishing wheat grew in Paradise, the stalks tall as a man's shoulders and free from tares or thistles or thorns. Often had he heard his parents talk about the giant stalks and golden ears, and never did he listen to their memories of Eden without the desire rising within him of enjoying similar experiences in his day. But this could not be. Still, what was there to prevent him growing corn like that in the garden? Accordingly he advanced to the guardian angel at the gate and asked the favour of a few grains to sow in his field. He was sure God would not be angry if this boon was allowed. The prohibition concerning the apples did not apply to the wheat. It would really please God if He found that men sought to fend for themselves and to make the most of the ground He had commanded them in the sweat of their brow to till. Then Cain turned the edge of his argument and began to sympathise with the angel. What a shame it was that he had to act the mean part of a watch-dog! His lot was more pitiable

than theirs, for while they had been expelled from Paradise because of excessive fondness for a certain fruit that flourished therein, he, poor immortal, had been expelled from Heaven in order to serve as sentry at the garden gates. They had liberty and might wander whither they would in God's beautiful world. So delightsome a world was it that they felt no hardship in being denied Paradise. He could enjoy neither Heaven nor the garden nor the world. Night and day he was a fixture at the gates. It was an ignominious experience, only an angelic being could endure the indignity. Arguments such as these ultimately prevailed and the coveted grains were handed over to Cain. Glorious was the harvest of the fields. But all the time God's anger was kindled against Cain. Destructive insects began their deadly work, the rains fell, the winds blew, and though the stalks of wheat were tough as oak branches they snapped in the tempest. The unfaithful angel was transformed into a man, and when Cain sought to turn aside the displeasure of Jehovah by offering upon an altar the fruits of the soil, the smoke of the sacrifice damped down. The curse of God remained upon him and he gave himself up to the madness of despair.

Erasmus must have been perfectly at home with his company or he would never have ventured upon so elaborate a story, here given in barest outline, but told at the time with all the details

of carefully studied fiction. The fact that he was a foreigner and ignorant of the English tongue did not shut him out from the communion of English university men. Latin was the language in which scholars of all countries wrote and spoke, and Erasmus had complete mastery of this tongue of the learned. Indeed he perfected himself in Latin to the neglect of his own language, so much so that when corresponding on one occasion with a friend in Holland he begged to be excused for not writing in Dutch seeing that he had next to no knowledge of his own mother-tongue!

The Oxford days, extending to some three or four months at the longest,[1] passed swiftly and happily by. It has been assumed, though evidence is wanting, that Greek studies were pursued under the guidance of his new masters; it is more certain that progress was made with a new edition of the writings of Jerome. Colet all the time was doing his best to persuade him to make his home in England and to join him in his work of theological and Biblical reconstruction. Oxford and England had need of him, and if only he would consent to lecture, say, on the Pentateuch or Isaiah, while he (Colet) continued his course on the Apostle Paul, a new era would dawn. In reply Erasmus said

[1] Most biographers have concluded that this visit to England lasted for fully fifteen months, but the internal evidence of the Erasmian Epistles renders this view untenable.

that he possessed no qualification for the task his friend sought to impose; if Colet had asked for water out of a rock his request would have been as reasonable. Besides, he had no desire to fix himself in a theological professor's chair, much as he admired his friend's attempt to restore to its pristine dignity the teaching of the New Testament, "now overgrown with scholastic briars and thorns". His purpose was to take the whole field of classic literature for his province, hence he must soon return to his "forsaken Paris," and perhaps take flight into Italy. Colet had taken upon his shoulders a heavy burden, but he was equal to the bearing of it without help from "Erasmus the nobody," who had neither strength nor name. The main reason why Erasmus was not prepared to join Colet in his crusade was not stated in so many words, perhaps because he was unconscious of his own idiosyncrasy. It lay in his vagrant disposition, in his instinctive dread of anything like self-committal. Continuance in one stay, however pleasant, always proved irksome to him, and change for change's sake must at all costs be secured. To join a movement or to take up a professorship would involve a serious curtailment of the freedom without which life would be, at best, mere existence. He could not consent to put himself in bondage to any man or to any cause. This fact must be borne in mind when we enter upon a

consideration of the vexed question of his attitude towards Luther and the Reformation.

Previous to his departure from England on 27th January, 1500, Erasmus was honoured by an introduction to the children of Henry VII. at Eltham, near Greenwich. It is made out that Thomas More played a trick upon his friend and inveigled him into the presence of the Prince and Princess before he knew whither he was being taken. More, after the custom of the times, made his obeisance to young Henry, the future Henry VIII., then a boy of nine, and presented him with his compliments and a manuscript of his own; Erasmus, taken unawares, had nothing to offer and was chagrined at his unpreparedness, especially when during luncheon the Prince asked him to write something. "I went home," says Erasmus, "and in spite of the fact that there was no friendliness between me and the Muses—we had had no traffic with each other for a long time—I composed an ode in three days." The poem, entitled *Prosopopœia Britanniæ,* said the proper thing—there is no country in the world like England, no king worthy to unloose the latchet of Henry VII., no prince so truly regal as the boy who bore his father's name. One is thankful that Erasmus did not waste more than three days over this gaudy patchwork. Poems written to royal order, even by Poets Laureate, are seldom successful compositions.

CHAPTER V

THE FIRST PERIOD OF LITERARY ACTIVITY: THE "ADAGIA"—THE "ENCHIRIDION"—PANEGYRIC ON PHILIP

ERASMUS was now thirty-three years of age. The challenge of Prince Henry—"produce something"—was not fully met by the poetical squib which he filched from the Muses in three days. It was time he girded himself for his life's task and made proof of his powers. Hitherto he had been preparing himself for ministry, studies had been prosecuted with unremitting diligence, friendships more valuable than all the gold of Crœsus had been formed. It remained for him to compass his ambitions, and at the same time to justify the predictions of his friends. "When a man has a competency," asserts one of the Greek poets, "he ought to begin the practice of virtue," a dictum which drew from Plato the laconic comment, "Perhaps sooner". It is well that Erasmus did not defer the practice either of virtue or of literature until the ideal conditions laid down by the

poet had been fulfilled. Other men might enjoy a competency, Erasmus never. He was always careful to stretch his needs beyond the limits of present income, however adequate such might prove to be. It is a common thing to find him nursing some financial grievance, moaning piteously the while over his hard and beggared lot. In most cases these grievances were imaginary, and need not have been entertained for a single hour. One case of exception, when complaint had ground to rest upon, occurred at the close of this first English visit. He came to England "nakeder than a rock"; so generous were his friends that they despatched him with gold valued at fully £200. A law was then in force which forbade the exportation of gold. Erasmus, the fear of this statute before his eyes, and acting upon advice, took the precaution of changing his money from English currency to French, thinking it could not then be touched. But he was sadly undeceived. The Custom House Officers at Dover relieved him of his burden. Threats, entreaties, were unavailing; he had to proceed on his journey without a coin.

It was an exasperating experience, also, as events proved, an experience of blessing. The whip of poverty was as effectual as the challenge of a prince, and under its stimulus the aggrieved scholar set himself to "produce something" worthy and profitable. Postponing the Italian

journey which he had promised himself after a brief sojourn in Paris he threw all his energy into his Greek studies, and addressed himself to his first serious literary work—the *Adagia*—a collection of proverbs culled from the wide field of the classics, each adage illustrated by reflections extending in some instances to elaborate dissertations. The first edition, printed in Paris in 1500, comprised 818 Greek and Latin proverbs. The last edition that passed through the author's hands was printed at Basel by Froben in 1523, and contained 4,251 adages. A more conspicuous example of literary diligence it would be difficult to find. Erasmus himself tells us in his comment upon the phrase "*Herculei labores*" what severe toil the work involved. "Every writer, ancient and modern, good and bad, who had composed either in Greek or Latin, and in whatever style or on whatever topic, had not merely to be looked through, but to be most thoroughly and carefully searched. . . . Human life is scarcely long enough for one to examine and consider so many Greek and Latin poets, grammarians, orators, logicians, sophists, historians, mathematicians, philosophers, theologians, to enumerate the very titles of whose writings would induce fatigue; and this work not to be done once only, but over and over again!" The most difficult part of his task, he goes on to explain, was the hunt after manuscripts and especially the

interpretation of these "often dim, decayed and worm-eaten" parchments when found.

The book hit the humour of the hour and ran during the author's lifetime into sixty-two editions. An apt classical quotation was a mark of scholarship then as now, and men of letters everywhere hailed with enthusiasm a work which saved them the toil of original research. Nor was the *Adagia* less welcome to the common people. The proverbs wore a homelike look and were applied to present-day affairs with such pungency and appropriateness that men of all ranks were able to appreciate their wisdom. The author's hardest knocks were reserved for the superstitions of monks and kings to the undisguised enjoyment of the community at large. "If you look at the priests and mark the unkempt beard, the sallow countenance, the cowl, the drooping head, the girdle, the austere expression, you would at once conclude that they were paragons of virtue; but if you look within the Silenus" (an image of the foster-father of Bacchus) "you will discover scamps, gluttons, swindlers, profligates, thieves, tyrants. . . ." "Spiritual leaders vie with men of the world in acquiring lands, servants, mules, horses, houses, or, more correctly, palaces—anything and everything in order to cut a dash and make a show." Kings, like eagles, were charged with being aflame with the lust of conquest; popes, unlike Him whose vicar they claimed to

be, embarrassed themselves with the riches which Christ called "thorns," and laboured mainly to promote the temporal interests of their own kith and kin. It had long been whispered that the vicars of Christ spent their time in making nests for relatives and in lining them well at the expense of the State; Erasmus shouted these things from the housetops. No wonder ecclesiastics retorted that the authorised proverbs of Solomon were enough without the uninspired adages of a young turn-coat like Erasmus.

The plague broke out in Paris, and in order to escape it Erasmus went first to Orleans and, having returned to Paris for a brief sojourn, afterwards to Brussels and Tournehens. It was during this second Tournehens visit that he came across the gentleman whose reckless living led to the composition of the *Enchiridion Militis Christiani*, a treatise written with intent to win the profligate man's soul. The rake's wife recognised the deference her husband paid to the words of Erasmus, and entreated the young divine to use his opportunity of moral suasion and write something that might turn her lord from the error of his ways. Accordingly Erasmus forged an *Enchiridion*, a "little dagger" or "manual," which need not, he said, be laid down even at meals or during sleep. The gentleman thus cared for was of military rank; hence the title of the treatise and the form of

composition. A soldier, it was expected, would find interest in military allusions, and the writer humbly hoped that the "little dagger" he had pleasure in handing to his friend would prove serviceable in the battle which every man must wage against sin and hell.

The first edition of this Christian soldier's manual appeared in 1503, and does not seem to have made an impression on any one, not even on the man for whose special benefit it was composed. Not until the monks began to scent heresy in the pages did the book command a sale. Tyndale translated it into English; Miles Coverdale issued an abridgment; Spanish, French, Italian and German editions were also published. The book was literally a "dagger" in the hand of all who desired to aim blows at the corruptions of the Church as well as at the evils of their own individual heart. Careful discrimination is made between the "form of godliness" and "the power thereof," a distinction vital to true religion but blurred in many minds by the elaborate ritual of the day. "It may be that you communicate every day and live the while to yourself, having no sense of your brother's sorrows; if so, you know only the form of the sacrament; but if on communicating you strive to realise in your life the purpose and end of the ordinance; if your spirit is as the spirit of Christ, your body as the body of Christ, a lively member of the Church; if

you love all things for the sake of Jesus alone; if you think that all your possessions are held in trust in behalf of needy ones everywhere; if the afflictions of others burden you as though they were your own, then you communicate worthily, because spiritually. . . . You have been baptised, conclude not that you are a Christian if your thought is engrossed in worldly matters; in appearance you are a Christian, in point of fact you are as heathenish as a Gentile. Why? Because you have 'the form' only of the sacrament and deny its 'power'. What profit is there in ablutions of the body when the soul remains uncleansed? What good end is served by rubbing salt into the skin if the heart is unseasoned? . . . Wherein is the benediction of holy-water sprinkling if the stain of the mind is not washed away?" In every paragraph of these thirteen chapters the note of the Christian preacher sounds. There are passages which remind us of Thomas à Kempis, so insistent is the writer upon the duty and wisdom of self-scrutiny and self-denial. "Can anything be more witless than the practice of attending to things without, things that have no bearing upon your soul at all, while you ignore completely the working of your own heart and the things that vitally concern you. You have much to say about the calamities of Britain; talk rather of the plague of your own heart—envy, lust, ambition; what degree of mastery you have over these, what

signs of conquest." The law of the Christian life is applied not only to professors and to all who hold office in the Church, but also to civil rulers and dignitaries. "The aim of the Christian prince is not to excel others in wealth, but as far as in him lies to promote the well-being of all. . . . The only blot upon a prince's fair name is the doing of things contrary to the law. . . . The ideal method of government is not to be discovered by studying the ancients, or by heeding senators of the day, but by learning of Christ. How senseless it is when a Christian prince sets before him as an example men like Hannibal and Alexander and Cæsar and Pompey! . . . Nothing better befits a king or covers him with greater glory than the near approach to the one perfect Exemplar, Jesus, the King of kings, greatest and best."

We can understand the high value which Luther and his followers afterwards attached to the *Enchiridion*, and the condemnation of the work by the Sorbonne in 1543, when it shared with other heretical books the fate of burning by order of the Parliament of Paris. The aim of Erasmus, in the publication of this manual, was in no respect controversial, he wrote simply in order that he might combat the error which resolves religion into ceremonialism to the neglect of righteousness. He sought reform, not revolution; the purification and spiritual use of the Church's aids to piety, not their

abolition. It was allowable to fast, to adore images, to enter monasteries and convents, if men and women would only be loyal to Jesus Christ. The text of the whole work might have been chosen with appropriateness from 1 Cor. vii. 19: "*Circumcision is nothing, and uncircumcision is nothing, but the keeping of the commandments of God*".

Within twelve months of the issue of the *Enchiridion* we see Erasmus playing the *rôle* of the orator, at the request of John Paludanus, Professor of Rhetoric at Louvain University. On 6th January, 1504, he presented, in the Ducal Palace at Brussels, an address of welcome to Philip, Duke of Burgundy, son of the Emperor Maximilian, on his happy return from Spain. It was a great effort and, if delivered, the orator's—and listeners'—powers of endurance must have been taxed to the full. The honorarium for this oration was a hundred florins. As is to be expected there is plenty of adulation; the prince is extolled as a paragon of virtue.[1] One finds, however—and the discovery

[1] Erasmus's views as to the value of adulatory epistles may be gathered from a passage in his *Encomium Moriæ* and from a letter to Paludanus at Louvain. "It has become the practice for some men, reputed to be wise and great, to secure the services of a windy orator or a scribbler who will extol them to the skies for a consideration, and use up no end of lies in fashioning their extraordinary characters; and these individuals thus praised sky-high perk up and display their feathers like the peacocks they are, while the shameless log-roller continues to puff the

comforts—a leaven of moral exhortation hidden in the heart of this panegyric. A wise ruler, Philip is reminded, will encourage peace rather than stir up war. He will prove himself to be, in Homer's phrase, the "shepherd of the people," in Plato's phrase, the "guardian of the State". He will add to the revenue, not by increase of taxation, but by decrease of expenditure. In fine, he who is chief of all will be the servant of all and seek not his own aggrandisement but the well-being of his land. "Astrologers tell us that there appear at certain intervals stars with sweeping train which presage revolution in matters of State, act even

miserable muffin and to set him forth as the embodiment of all the virtues, to each of which he is about as near as heaven is to hell. The whole business is, in short, the clothing of a jackdaw in borrowed plumes, the attempt to change the Ethiop's skin, the effort to draw over giant shoulders the garments of a dwarf." Thus speaks "Folly". The letter to Paludanus is written in a different vein. "People who imagine that panegyrics are sheer flattery seem to be ignorant of the end which men of wisdom proposed to themselves when they hit upon this form of oratory. It was their aim so to place before men the beauties of virtue that bad rulers might be converted, the worthy encouraged, the ignorant instructed, the weak strengthened, and even the most reckless led to repentance. . . . If you wished to reprove the harshness of some tyrannical prince, how could you more effectually do this than by the exaltation of mercy? In what way could you more sternly rebuke his greed or vehemence or lust than by praising his unselfishness, his gentleness and his self-command? . . . Even if a prince is far from being what he ought to be, it is highly important that his subjects should picture him to be one of the best of men."

fatally upon the minds and bodies of men, and change the course of rivers and sea, the composition of earth and air. But a comet is not anything like so disturbing to the world as is a bad ruler, nor is there in the whole sky a star so benign in influence as an upright prince."

CHAPTER VI

VISIT TO ITALY—BOLOGNA—VENICE—ARCHBISHOP ALEXANDER—DIALOGUE OF JULIUS II.—GERMAN INNS

THE oration upon Philip was a piece of literary byplay in the midst of severer pursuits. From a letter to John Colet, written in congratulation upon his appointment to the Deanery of St. Paul's, London, we learn that Erasmus had been devoting himself since his English visit mainly to the study of the sacred writings, and that he was irritated at anything and everything standing in the way. "I long to be free so that I may give myself wholly to the study of the Divine Word." Accordingly he had been working hard at his Greek, for, says he, a man is nowhere, let him labour in whatever branch of literature he chooses, without a knowledge of Greek. In matters of Biblical interpretation this knowledge was of supreme moment. He had himself, he confesses, set out in high feather to prepare a Commentary on St. Paul's Epistle to the Romans, but had been compelled to abandon the task owing to his "lack of Greek".

This deficiency in equipment supplied, Erasmus began for the twentieth time to turn wistful eyes upon Italy, the land of the Renaissance, and to covet, "for his friends' sakes," of course, a doctor's degree. A second visit to England prefaced the fulfilment of this long-cherished project, and for five months of the year 1506, perhaps longer, he enjoyed the fellowship of his friends More and Colet and Warham, Archbishop of Canterbury, the last named a friend whose patronage and help proved to be of inestimable service in future years. While staying under the roof of Thomas More the two scholars translated Lucian's *Tyrannicide*, and each composed a Declamation in reply; they also made a Latin translation of the greater part of the Dialogues. A visit was made to Cambridge, at which university the degree of B.D. was conferred. Then, just as More thought he was rooting his friend, Erasmus loosened himself from English soil, accepted a tutorship to the two sons of Battista Boerio, physician to Henry VII., and set out with them, *via* Paris, on the journey to Italy, after which he had hankered these fifteen years. A stormy voyage of four days across the Channel threw him into influenza. "The glands are swollen under my ears on both sides, my temples are throbbing, and both my ears are ringing." A good clear case of the mumps, suggests Dr. Emerton, and indeed the symptoms look that way.

The route taken on this memorable journey was by way of Orleans and Lyons, through Savoy into Piedmont. The tediousness of the journey was beguiled by squabbles between his attendants, and by the composition of a poem on the subject of the approach of old age which he wrote on horseback while crossing the Alps.

Turin was reached without misadventure, and here, on the 4th of September, 1506, the degree of Doctor of Divinity was conferred upon him. Bologna, at that time a city of tumult, was the next halting place. Hearing that Pope Julius II. had threatened the city with an interdict and was advancing *via* Imola with the intention of taking it by force Erasmus withdrew without delay to Florence, returning when the wheel of fortune revolved in favour of the Papacy. He was in the crowd on those days of civic intoxication, 10th and 11th November, when Julius II. rode through the thirteen triumphal arches that spanned the carpeted streets. The shame and incongruity of it all—the Vicar of Christ seated on warrior's steed—burnt itself into his heart. It was a thing scarcely to be pardoned, that spiritual potentates should foment wars and prosecute them. Time was when the representatives of Christ sought to win the world by manifestation of the truth to every man's conscience, and when their very shadow conveyed healing to the sick, but these days of benediction had long since passed away.

The sojourn at Bologna was extended beyond a twelvemonth, and was marked by several incidents which, Erasmus says, nearly cost him his life. It appears that, adopting the French custom, he wore a white linen band over his monastic gown. The doctors of the town whose duty it was to attend to cases of plague, wore a somewhat similar dress in order that pedestrians might recognise them in the streets and take care not to touch them. In addition to this precaution the doctors were expected to avoid the main thoroughfares and to walk only through the unfrequented by-streets. One day, when Erasmus was passing along a thronged roadway, two ruffians, mistaking him for a physician, fell upon him and would have made short work of him with their swords if a lady had not come to his rescue and pointed out that his white band denoted the priest and not the physician. On another occasion a crowd gathered round him with sticks and stones, and began to yelp at his heels, "Kill the dog!" "kill the dog!" A young man was his saviour this time, and advised him to lay aside his monkish band unless he wished some fine day to be stoned to death. Accordingly the band was concealed under the black gown; he did not presume to remove it. Mr. Nichols regards the story as founded upon some actual occurrence, but Dr. Emerton bluntly terms the incidents "cock-and-bull stories," and even Mr. R. B. Drummond, who

usually places the most implicit confidence in the word of Erasmus concerning himself, hesitates to close his eyes and swallow this dainty morsel of fiction that the scholar-monk would send him. "Who could believe that, in a city like Bologna, wholly given up to superstition, in which there were no less than twenty-two monasteries, and at least one belonging to the Canons Regular, a monk dressed scrupulously according to the fashion of the place could possibly be mistaken for a physician ; or that a scapulary, which would appear as two narrow strips of white beside the black gown, and retreating under it, bears any resemblance, except in whiteness, to a handkerchief suspended from one shoulder *above* the gown of the wearer ? Before all, who could believe that Erasmus would remain a day in a city in which the plague had broken out ? "

The stories thus questioned are narrated in the famous letter to Lambertus Grunnius, one of the secretaries of Pope Leo X. at Rome, the letter, it will be remembered, which contains the account of the early life of Erasmus and his struggle with the guardians. The communication is of the nature of an *Apologia pro vita sua*, and was written in vindication of his action in leaving the monastery, and with the further view of securing papal permission to discard the monastic dress. Hence the Bologna stories. Erasmus would not have been Erasmus

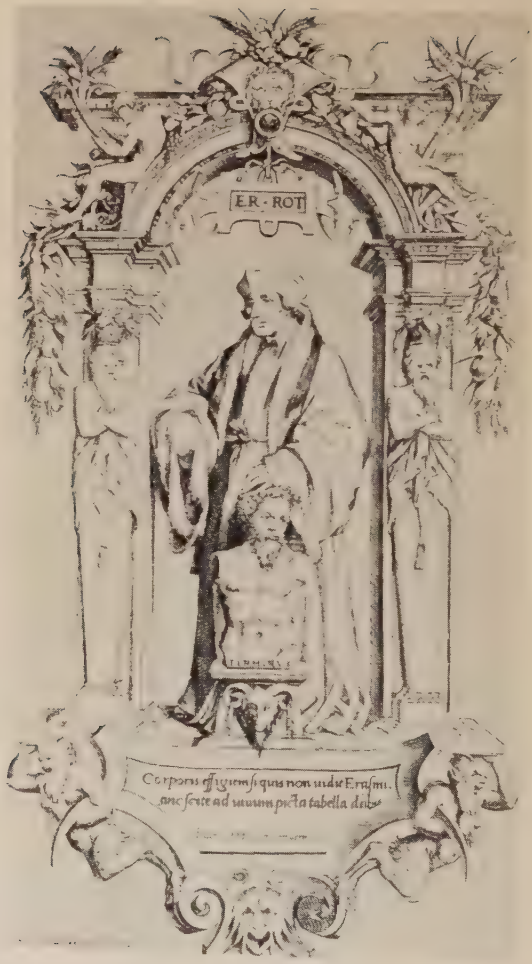
had he scrupled to "adorn" his tale, if by so doing he could more certainly accomplish his purpose. Grunnius read the letter to the Pope in the presence of several dignitaries of the Church, and the entire company expressed themselves as charmed with the writer's style; the Pope was nearly carried off his feet with admiration and at once granted the sought-for boon.

From Bologna Erasmus went to Venice, attracted thither by the fame of Aldus Manutius, the great printer and publisher. "I should think my *Lucubrations* secure of immortality," he writes, "if they came out printed in your type, especially that minute type which is the most elegant of all."[1] Eight years had passed since the *Adagia* was first issued and a new edition was in demand. For nine months he worked hard in authorship, publishing in addition to the revised and enlarged *Adagia* a new translation of Hecuba and Iphigenia in Aulis, also editing Terence and Plautus. "We were so busy that we had hardly time, as the saying is, to scratch our ears." During this period he boarded at the printer's establishment and developed a strong interest in the wide literary circle of which Aldus was the centre. As is usual he poses as a martyr, piteously describing in his *Colloquy*, "The Rich Miser," his many sufferings

[1] The type now known as "Italic". Aldus is said to have copied it from the hand-writing of Petrarch.

at the hands of incompetent cooks. Finally, he left Venice with the beginnings of the malady which remained with him all his days. "Every time the gravel comes I am reminded of Venice; it first plagued me there." The inferior wine placed on the Aldine table is said to have caused three or four deaths from stone in the establishment every year. We have already seen that Erasmus is quite in character when exaggerating personal inconveniences, and as a rule one can laugh at his heroics, but in this case we feel that more is involved than the crotchets of one man—the good name of an entire household—and it is not possible to read, without moral indignation, the aspersions flung upon those under whose roof he had been glad to lodge and whose friendship he had counted it an honour to share. It ought to be remembered, however, in extenuation, that Erasmus had been sorely provoked when he wrote the colloquy descriptive of his Venetian experiences. The tale had gone round, circulated by one Scaliger, that he was a paid proof-reader in Aldus's employ, and that he frequently gave way to bouts of intemperance. Erasmus knew how to pay slanderers back in their own coin.

At Padua, whither he removed in the autumn of this year, Erasmus renewed friendship with Marcus Musurus, whom he had known at Venice and who now held a Greek professorship at the university.



ERASMUS WITH 'TERMINUS'

Woodcut by Holbein

He also acted as tutor to Alexander, son of James IV. of Scotland, a youth still in his "teens," and yet old enough to be elevated to the Archbishopric of St. Andrews. After a short stay Padua was left for Ferrara, where Erasmus met several eminent scholars, among them Richard Pace of England, Colet's successor as Dean of St. Paul's. From Ferrara he proceeded *via* Bologna to Sienna, and here the youthful Archbishop and his tutor spent several months in serious studies. Erasmus, however, was now too near Rome to rest for any length of time outside its fascinating boundaries; accordingly, in the early spring of 1509 we find that he has pushed his way thither alone.

It is not within the province of this biography to follow the pathetic fortunes of Archbishop Alexander. Suffice to say that he fell by his father's side, a few years later, on the field of Flodden. He was a youth of gracious disposition, a close and gifted student. Between pupil and master a genuine affection was kindled, so much so that, on parting, gifts were exchanged, the tutor receiving amongst other things a ring on which was engraved the head of the god Terminus. Erasmus chose as motto the words *Concedo nulli* and continued to use the ring as a seal during the remainder of his days. The inscription was admonitory, and had respect to the god Terminus —death—against whom no one can successfully

contend; it had no reference whatever, as his enemies suggested, to the wearer himself, as though he claimed to be foremost amongst his fellows, and invincible. The pain which from his Venetian days continued periodically to visit him suggested, it may be presumed, the sobering motto.

The sojourn at Rome was not specially eventful. A round of literary and ecclesiastical interviews filled the time. Humanists like Scipio Carteromachos and Cardinals Dominic Grimani, Raffaelle Riario, the Cardinal de' Medici, afterwards Pope Leo X., and others, entered into the circle of his acquaintanceship. The reigning Pontiff was Julius II., the warlike vicar who, in the words of a popular preacher of his day, "brandished in his omnipotent right hand the three-pronged fatal thunderbolt". Julius was on the eve of his Venetian campaign and, somehow or other, Erasmus was led into the miserable manœuvre of writing, first a treatise against the war, and then, finding how contrary this composition was to "the powers that be," a second treatise in favour of the campaign. The famous dialogue, *Julius Exclusus*, published anonymously in Paris some four years later (1513), gives Erasmus's real mind concerning this "spiritual Potentate," though the evidence of authorship is still inconclusive. Many there were at the time who declared it to be his doing; no one else, said they, could handle so caustic a pen. Erasmus consistently,

and even vehemently denied complicity in its publication. "I have never yet written any work," he says, in a letter to Wolsey (1518), "nor do I intend ever to write any, without putting my name to it". Julius, attended by a familiar spirit, is represented in the dialogue as standing at the gate of Paradise demanding admittance. Peter questions, challenges, cross-questions, and the Pope replies. We give a brief extract from the conversation :—

Julius : "Open the gates, I say. Why is there no one to receive me?"

Peter : "Here is fine talk. Who are you, I say? . . ."

Julius : " . . . I am Julius the Ligurian, P.M., as you can see by the letters if you can read."

Peter : "P.M.! What is that? Pestis Maxima?"

Julius : "Pontifex Maximus, you rascal."

Peter : "If you are three times Maximus, if you are Mercury Trismegistus, you can't come in unless you are Optimus too."

Julius : "Impertinence! You, who have been no more than Sanctus all these ages—and I Sanctissimus, Sanctissimus Dominus, Sanctitas, Holiness itself, with Bulls to show it."

Peter : "Is there no difference between being Holy and being called Holy? Ask your flatterers who called you these fine names to give you admittance. Let me look at you a little closer. Hum!

Signs of impiety in plenty, and none of the other thing. Who are these fellows behind you? Faugh! They smell of stews, drink-shops and gunpowder. Have you brought goblins out of Tartarus to make war with heaven? Yourself, too, are not precisely like an apostle. Priest's cassock and bloody armour below it, eyes savage, mouth insolent, forehead brazen, body scarred with sins all over, breath loaded with wine, health broken with debauchery. Ay, threaten as you will, I will tell you what you are for all your bold looks. You are Julius the Emperor come back from hell. . . ."

Julius: "Make an end, I say, or I will fling a thunderbolt at you. I will excommunicate you. I have done as much to kings before this. Here are the Bulls ready. . . ."

Peter: "Do your worst. Curses won't serve your turn here. Excommunicate me! By what right, I would know?"

Julius: "The best of rights. You are only a priest, perhaps not that—you cannot consecrate. Open I say."

Peter: "You must show your merits first; no admission without merits."

Julius: "What do you mean by merits?"

Peter: "Have you taught true doctrine?"

Julius: "Not I. I have been too busy fighting. There are monks to look after doctrine, if that is of any consequence."

Peter : "Have you gained souls to Christ by pious example ?"

Julius : "I have sent a good many to Tartarus."

Peter : "Have you worked any miracles ?"

Julius : "Pshaw ! miracles are out of date."

Peter : "Have you been diligent in your prayers ?"

Spirit : "You waste your breath. This is mockery."

[Julius then tells how he rose to the pontificate, and claims that no predecessor had done so much for the Church and Christ as he.]

Peter : "What did you do ?"

Julius : "I raised the revenue. I invented new offices and sold them. I invented a way to sell bishoprics without simony. When a man is made a bishop he resigns the offices which he holds already. He cannot resign what he has not got, so I made him buy something first, and in this way each promotion brought me in six or seven thousand ducats, besides the Bulls. I re-coined the currency and made a great sum that way. Nothing can be done without money. Then I annexed Bologna to the Holy See. I beat the Venetians. I jockeyed the Duke of Ferrara. I defeated a schismatical council by a sham council of my own. I drove the French out of Italy, and I would have driven the Spaniards out too, if the Fates had not brought me here. I have set all the princes of Europe by the

ears. I have torn up treaties, kept great armies in the field. I have covered Rome with palaces, and I have left five millions in the Treasury behind me. . . . And here you are keeping the door shut against one who has deserved so well of Christ and the Church. And I have done it all myself, too. I owe nothing to my birth, for I don't know who my father was; nothing to learning, for I have none; nothing to youth, for I was old when I began; nothing to popularity, for I was hated all round. . . ."

Peter: "He who represents Christ ought to try to be like Christ. But, tell me, is there no way of removing a wicked Pope?"

Julius: "Absurd! Who can remove the highest authority of all?"

Peter: "That the Pope is the highest is a reason why he should be removed if he causes scandal. Bad princes can be removed. . . ."

Julius: "A Pope can only be corrected by a General Council, but no General Council can be held without the Pope's consent; otherwise it is a synod, and not a council. Let the council sit, it can determine nothing unless the Pope agrees; and again, a single Pope having absolute power is superior to the council. Thus he cannot be deposed for any crime whatsoever."

Peter: "What, not for murder?"

Julius: "No, not if it be parricide."

Peter: "Not for fornication?"

Julius: "Not for incest."

Peter: "Not for simony?"

Julius: "Not for six hundred acts of simony."

Peter: "Not for poisoning?"

Julius: "No, nor for sacrilege."

Peter: "Not for blasphemy?"

Julius: "No, I say."

Peter: "Not for all these crimes collected in a single person?"

Julius: "Add six hundred more to them, there is no power which can depose the Pope of Rome. . . ."

Peter: "Fortunate Pope, who can cheat Christ with his laws. Quite true, the remedy in such a case is not in a council. The people ought to rise with paving stones and dash such a wretch's brains out."[1]

This dialogue, every one can see, is Erasmian, whether or not it was the product of Erasmus's pen, and ranks with the *Encomium Moriæ* and the most satirical of the *Familiar Colloquies*. Rome, with all its fascinations, did not hold the restless writer long; in June he set out for England, travelling *via* Constance and Strassburg and Holland. The journey through Germany was enlivened by the cavalier attention paid to the party at the

[1] Extracts from Froude's abridgment, *Life of Erasmus*, pp. 158-163.

various inns. Erasmus had accustomed himself during late years to many comforts, and the rough-and-tumble experience of inn-life in this "uncivilised" land fell hard upon him. One cannot regret the sorrows of the journey, as they were the inspiration of the captivating *Colloquy*, "Diversoria"[1] or "The Inns," a description of sixteenth-century inn-life which Charles Reade has adapted with such signal success in his *Cloister and the Hearth*. French hotels, according to Erasmus, were models of cleanliness and comfort compared with the wretched German "furnaces" in which travellers were baked and smothered. The most fastidious person could not receive better treatment in his own house than in a French inn, whereas in Germany—! But we will let Erasmus tell his own tale through the lips of two friends in council:—

Gulielmus: "It has not been my fortune to pass through Germany, pray tell me, if you will, how they entertain a guest."

Bertulphus: "I cannot say whether the same practice holds everywhere, but I will describe what I myself have seen. No one hails a traveller pleasantly lest he should seem to be enticing him to stay, a proceeding they count vulgar and quite below the dignity of a German. When you have shouted awhile, an individual jerks his head out of

[1] Some writers have assumed that the experiences of the "Diversoria" befel Erasmus on the way to Italy, but Germany was not in the line of the outward route.

the furnace-window (for they live in these places almost until midsummer) like a tortoise out of its shell. You ask if lodgings can be had, and if the tortoise does not say 'no' you may conclude that there is room. On inquiring for the stables he directs you by a wave of his hand, and there you must attend to your horse unaided, for no servant will lend a hand. If the inn is a first-class one a man will guide you to the stables, but you will find the corner selected for your horse is far from satisfactory. They reserve the better stalls for those who come later, especially for the nobility. Lodge a complaint, and you at once hear, '*If things are not to your mind seek another inn*'. In the towns hay is to be had, but the little allowed is given with ill grace and is almost as expensive as oats. When you have put up your horse you adjourn into the furnace, boots and baggage and mud—everybody shares this room."

Gulielmus: "In France they give you a separate room where you can change your clothes, make yourself presentable, warm yourself and loll awhile if you want so to do."

Bertulphus: "You'll find nothing of the kind here. In the stove-room you take off your boots, put on your slippers, and, if you are so minded, change your underclothing; you hang your wet things by the fireplace and stand near it yourself to dry. Water is provided for any who want to

wash their hands, but it is so very muddy that you have to get another supply to wash the lather away."

Gulielmus: "People of this kind who have nothing effeminate about them are to be commended."

Bertulphus: "If you arrive at four o'clock in the afternoon, it will be nine o'clock, perhaps ten, before you sit down to supper."

Gulielmus: "Why, how's that?"

Bertulphus: "They prepare nothing until they see how many are staying, thus one cooking does duty for all".

Gulielmus: "They are bent on saving."

Bertulphus: "You have grasped the fact. It is often the case that eighty or ninety people are packed together in that griddle-room—pedestrians, horsemen, merchants, sailors, waggoners, farmers, children, women, sick and sound."

Gulielmus: "Quite a brotherhood!"

Bertulphus: "One combs his hair, another mops up his perspiration, another cleans his leggings or his boots, another reeks with garlic; in short, there is as much confusion of tongues and men as there was in olden days at the building of the tower of Babel. If they discover a foreigner amongst them, one who bears himself like a gentleman, they every one stare at him as if he were some animal specimen from Africa; after they are

seated at the table, they will peep over their shoulders and stare and stare until they even forget their suppers."

Gulielmus: "At Rome, or Paris, or Venice, nobody is astonished about anything."

Bertulphus: "In the meantime it is a crime to call for anything. When the evening is far spent and none other guests are expected, an old greybeard of a servant, with clipped hair, sour countenance and shabby clothes, appears on the scene."

Gulielmus: "Such gowks ought to be cupbearers to the Roman cardinals!"

Bertulphus: "He glances round and reckons up how many people have jammed themselves into the furnace; the more visitors the greater heat . . . it is only proper hospitality, in their eyes, to plunge every comer into a profuse perspiration. If some greenhorn unaccustomed to the bath opens the window a wee bit, in dread of suffocation, the cry is immediately heard, '*Shut it!*' If you say '*I cannot bear it!*' you hear, '*Pack off then to another inn!*' . . . By-and-by our bearded Ganymede returns to lay napkins on the table according to the number present—not damask, but something that looks like the snippings of old sails. At least eight guests are placed at each table. Those who are versed in the customs of the country sit down where they

like, for there is no difference between rich and poor, master and servant."

Gulielmus: "This is that old-world communism which fashion the tyrant has quite stamped out. I suppose Christ thus lived with His disciples."

Bertulphus: "When everybody is seated, that sour-faced old Ganymede reappears on the scene and again reckons up the company. Returning, he gives each person a wooden bowl, a spoon of the same silver, a glass, and then, later on, a noggin of bread at which everybody nibbles during the time that the porridge is cooking. In this way they sometimes spend the greater part of an hour."

Gulielmus: "Does nobody in the meantime call out for food?"

Bertulphus: "No one familiar with the customs of the country. At last the wine is brought on—mercy!—it is as smoky as can be! The sophists ought to drink no other, so acrid is it and harsh. If a guest should ask under breath for another brand, offering of course to pay extras, they at first ignore the request, but stare at the speaker as though they would stab him; and if you are not thus to be silenced they make reply: 'Many Counts and Marquises have stayed here and not one has found fault with my wine; if it is not to your taste, you can seek another inn'. They imagine their own noblemen to be the only people of importance in the world, and they are everlastingly trotting

out their coats of arms. At length a piece of bread is brought to take off the keen edge of one's hunger. Soon the dishes are laid in famous style ; as a rule the first has small squares of bread soaked in meat broth, or if it happens to be a fish day, in soup made of pulse. After this, another slop is brought ; then a serving of butcher's meat, twice boiled, or warmed-up salt meat ; then pulse again, and afterwards more solid food, until, hunger having been appeased, they trot out the roast beef or stewed fish, a dish not to be despised, but in this case the serving is not liberal, and soon the dishes are taken away."

We can imagine the pity Erasmus would lavish upon himself while passing through experiences such as these. Tavern brawling, stove-like rooms, bad breath and "common" company, sour wine, dirty table linen, bedrooms minus furniture save the bed, sheets to lie in that had been washed " perhaps six months ago," no one to groom his horse or to run him an errand, no one to doff the cap and to quail in his presence ! If things were quite as bad as Erasmus represents them we are thankful he survived, and it is to be hoped the untoward circumstances did him good !

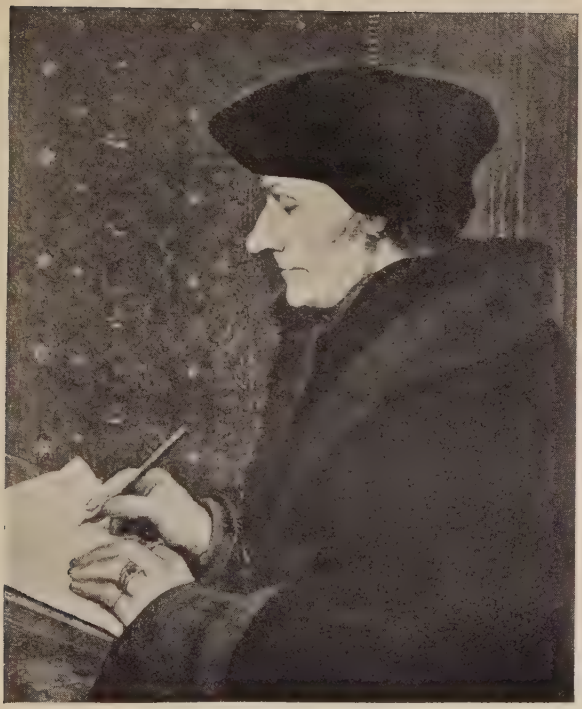
England was reached in the month of July, 1509, a visit which opens perhaps the busiest and happiest period of his life.

CHAPTER VII

THE PRAISE OF FOLLY

Distance : away, you sullen, sheepish Souls,
Whose broody Thoughts fit always hatching Rules !
Your Tub-Philosophers, whose croaking Brains
Make Earth as Hellish as the *Stygian* Plains ;
Your uncouth, low'ring Grimaces become
Your moody Musings on your selves at Home.
But no infernal Visage must be seen,
Where all are to be jolly by design.
Vail then, or vanish, die or disappear,
And leave us Fools to our Caresses here.
. . . . . .
With Frolicks drain your Souls of all their Earth,
Ne'er think, but laugh, and breathe no Air but Mirth.
—*The Praise of Folly*, 1709.—*Ed.*

THE English visit of 1509-1514 marks the second period of literary activity. During the first period were published the *Adagia*, first and second editions, the *Enchiridion Militis Christiani* and the *Panegyric on Philip of Burgundy*. Various poems, the *De Contemptu Mundi* and an epistle in commendation of Gaguin's *History of France* (the first printed work of Erasmus, September, 1495), were the outcome of the introductory period. With the dawn of the sixteenth century Erasmus rises to his full strength, his style being



ERASMUS

Portrait by Holbein in the Louvre

distinguished by remarkable ease and power. The *Encomium Moriæ*, one of the choicest specimens of prose that satirical literature has to show, was dashed off in the course of nine days immediately upon his arrival in England. In his preface, dedicated to Sir Thomas More, under whose hospitable roof he was then staying, Erasmus tells how the idea of the work came into his mind and explains the purpose he had in view in giving it to the world. The journey from Italy to England presented time and opportunity for reflection, and as he thought of the friend to whose house he was travelling, the name "More" hit the humour of his meditations, which grouped themselves around the subject of the folly (Μωρία) of mankind in general, and of ecclesiastics in particular. Thus the title of the satire was a pun on More's name. "Your own surname of More comes as near the literal sound of the word (Μωρία) as you yourself are distant from the signification of it, and that in all men's judgments is vastly wide." Then, in delightful fashion, Erasmus proceeds to knock the sword out of the hands of critics. He is not the first, he explains, to write after this rollicking fashion. If he is to be condemned on this count he will be banned in good company. Ages ago Homer had discoursed on the fribbling topic of a war between the frogs and mice, Virgil had expended his eloquence upon a gnat and a pudding, Ovid had written about a nut, Synesius

had composed a panegyric on baldness, Lucian had employed his pen in the defence of a fly, even St. Jerome had thought well to make reference to a certain writer who had recorded the last will of a hog. So those of his critics who desired to think the worst of him and his work were at liberty to entertain what thoughts they chose. He would not complain if they announced that the book was Erasmus amusing himself astride a hobby-horse. Why might he not thus tickle himself if he wanted so to do? Recreation was permitted in every walk of life; why deny literature its play? Surely diversions might be allowed even to studies, "especially when trifles may be a whet to more serious thoughts". In this sentence we have the author's design. The laugh was not raised for the laugh's sake. Though he aimed at sport rather than at satire the jocularity had seriousness behind it, the gravity of the preacher, the Truth-teller. "It is apparent," wrote the translator of an early illustrated edition,[1] "that (like persons of squinting optics who roll their eyes one way and yet direct their looks another) our author, archer-like, shoots just contrary from where he pretends to aim. . . . Under this covert he levels more securely, wounds more inoffensively and leaves room for a safer retreat than if he had fallen too

[1] *Moriæ Encomium*, done into *English* and illustrated with above fifty curious cuts, designed and drawn by *Hans Holbeine* (1709).

bluntly on and had made an open assault instead of an ambuscading *surprise*. . . . Subjects of this nature are certainly best handled when the persons to be reflected on are in the same periods *laughed out* of their mistakes and yet *flattered* into amendment."

The scope of this series allows us to give only the briefest digest of this remarkable volume.

FOLLY, the speaker, who delivers her oration in person, announces that she was born in the Fortunate Isles where drudgery and discontent and old age are unknown, and where the flowers blow fragrance sweet as the scents of the gardens of Adonis. Her father was no worn-out grandsire god, but Plutus, "not that Plutus in *Aristophanes*, old, dry, withered, sapless, blind, but the same in his younger and brisker days"; her nurses were the two jolly nymphs, *Drunkenness* and *Ignorance*; her attendants were *Self-love*, "who goes with a mincing gait and holds up her head so high," and *Flattery*, "she that looks so spruce and makes such bustle and noise," and *Forgetfulness*, she who "sits humdrum, as if half asleep," and *Laziness*, the maid who "always leans upon her elbow and sometimes yawns stretching out her arms," and *Pleasure*, garlanded with flowers, and *Sensuality*, smooth-skinned and fleshly, and *Madness*, wild-eyed, and last of all, *Intemperance* and *Sleep*.

As one might anticipate FOLLY regards herself with completest self-satisfaction. Her handmaidens

Flattery and *Self-love* ensure this temper of mind. She asserts, at the outset of her discourse, that she is the spice of life, the best preservative of youth, the most effectual antidote against age, in short, the sole source of the world's gaiety and mirth. Childhood, youth, friendship, marriage would lose their charm were it not for her. In a very real sense wisdom is folly and folly is wisdom. At the best, wisdom is a hindrance to success. The more knowledge an orator possesses, the more diffident he is and the less fluent. Plato's fine sentiment, "Happy are those commonwealths where either philosophers are elected kings, or kings turn philosophers," is not borne out by the testimony of history. As a rule no citizens are so forlorn and ill-governed as those whose chief magistrate is one of the learned. The power of fable, in other words the power of folly, is beyond that of carefully planned orations. How were the Romans quieted on one occasion of riot? Not by the passionate declamation of some renowned orator, but by an absurd tale about the revolt of the members of the body. When the Athenians grumbled against their rulers Themistocles silenced them by the fable of the fox and the hedgehog. Wise men, so called, would scorn to use such means; folly, the true wisdom, employs all arts, however absurd, in order to gain the desired end. With such innocent pleasantries FOLLY feels her way to the sermon she

PRAYER TO ST. CHRISTOPHER

DIVINITY DISPUTATION

has in her heart to deliver. There is fire in the eye and a new accent in the voice as she proceeds to pour ridicule upon the credulity of the age. "Some there are who imagine that if they bend the head every morning to an image of St. Christopher they will not die that day; others think that if they prate a prayer before a statue of St. Barbara they will pass through a battle unscathed and return uninjured to their homes; and yet again others who believe that if they appeal to St. Erasmus at certain times, with properly prepared tapers and prayers, they will at once become as rich as Dives. . . . What is to be said of those who cozen themselves with pardons and indulgences, who parcel out the period of Purgatory with mathematical precision into centuries, years, months, days; or of those who dupe themselves with the belief that charms, the telling of beads and such like—the invention of religious impostors, intent upon diversion or gain—will ensure riches, honour, pleasure, health, long life, a green old age, and after death a throne at the Saviour's right hand? . . . Or can anything be more absurd than the expectation of winning heaven by the daily repetition of those seven verses out of the Psalter which the devil is said to have taught St. Bernard, on the ground that by so doing the archdemon is hoisted with his own petard."

Having lampooned the superstitions of the masses

Folly turns the edge of her sarcasm upon the classes —merchants, poets, rhetoricians, lawyers, logicians, philosophers, schoolmasters, grammarians, ecclesiastics. How like, in many respects, the world of yesterday was to the world of to-day! "If the pulpit deliverance be a calm, thoughtful, well-reasoned discourse, everybody in the congregation begins to yawn, but if the preacher—excuse me, I ought perhaps to have said the prater—get excited and bang the pulpit cushion, flourish his arms and pass the hour in the telling of anecdotes, admirers will rise from their seats, open wide their ears and become the pink of propriety and attention. As to writers who hope to immortalise themselves by authorship those owe most to me who scribble nothing but commonplaces and irrelevancies, spoiling all the paper they blot. The more deeply lettered who write in scholarly fashion above the head of the average reader, and who challenge the criticism of experts, are to be pitied for their mental drudgery rather than envied for their erudition. In spite of addenda, delenda, erasures, rewriting, correcting, interlining, a completely new setting, they cannot succeed in satisfying themselves. Pleased with their work to-day they will be dissatisfied with it on the morrow, and wherefore all this toil? To the end that literary critics may pass upon them their meed of praise, a poor reward in truth for the

self-denial, vigilance and brain-throbbing which authorship involves. To these things may be added the undermining of health, perhaps a physical breakdown, injury to eyesight, it may be total blindness, poverty, envy, exclusion from worldly pleasures, premature old age, untimely death and every other imaginable evil besides. Far, far happier are those irresponsible quill-drivers before mentioned who never pause even to think, but write down the first word that comes to the mind, knowing that the more trashy their compositions are the wider will be the constituency of their readers. . . . It is amusing to see how easily a few favourable reviews puff up all such scribblers, and if they chance to become notorious enough to have their works placed on the front row of the book-sellers' stalls or to be themselves pointed out and whispered about while tramping the streets, there is no living with them. . . . One cannot fail to be entertained also at the practice of log-rolling when one author writes laudatory notices, verses, articles upon fellow-craftsmen, ascribing to one the title of Alcæus, to another the name of the peerless Callimachus, imputing to a third oratorical powers surpassing those of Cicero himself, to a fourth philosophical learning which even the divine Plato could not claim. . . . But for conceit of one's own abilities commend me," says FOLLY, "to the lawyers! They will announce their arguments as very gospel,

they will quote you six hundred precedents, not a single one of which may apply to the particular case in hand—no matter; they will set in array their authorities, parchments, commentaries, reports, and busy themselves with worm-eaten manuscripts, turning their profession from a pleasant occupation into slave-driving, valuing their briefs in proportion to their difficulty. Like unto these are the logicians and sophists, men who prate like parrots and who cannot be equalled in loquacity by a group of gossiping old women; the fact is their tongues make more clatter than the bells of a church tower."

At this point FOLLY's sarcasms become more biting. It might be safer, she admits, to pass the theologians by without a word, so thin-skinned and hot-tempered are they. If she fails to please them they are sure to raise the hue and cry of heresy and to thunder out an excommunication. The cleverness of these scholastic divines is almost beyond belief! "They will go into details concerning the work of Omnipotence in the creation of the Universe; they will show exactly how the taint of original sin comes to all the descendants of Adam; they will explain the mystery of the Immaculate Conception and make clear to you how, in the case of the consecrated wafer, accidents may subsist without a subject. But these are mere elementary matters; they will tackle problems infinitely more difficult with

equal confidence; for example, such questions as :—

"Whether Divine generation took place in an instant of time?

"Whether Christ, as a son, bears a twofold relation, each distinct, the one to God, the other to Mary?

"Whether the saying that the first Person of the Trinity hated the second is a possible proposition?

"Whether God Who became man could have taken upon Him the nature of a woman, or a devil, or an ass, or a herb, or a stone?

"Whether, supposing the latter, it would have been possible for a stone or a herb to preach the Gospel or suffer on the Cross?

"Whether, if St. Peter had celebrated the Eucharist while Christ was hanging on the Cross, the consecrated wafer would have been changed into the very body on the tree?

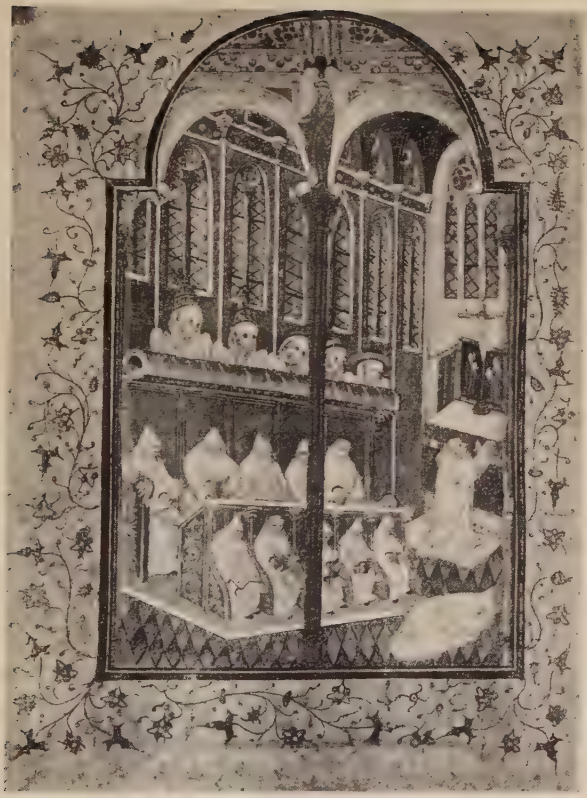
"Whether, in the Real Presence of the Sacrament, Christ's humanity and divinity are not separated the one from the other?

"Whether, after the Resurrection, saints eat and drink as on earth?"

There is, Folly declares, in each of the theological and philosophical sects, so much of learning, so much of unfathomable teaching, that the Apostles

themselves would require a new illuminating spirit if they ventured at any time to engage these later lights in controversy. They treat Scripture much as the potter does his clay, kneading it into the shape that best suits their interests and whims; "they strike the fire of subtlety out of the flint of obscurity". Their heads bulge out more than did Jove's when Pallas was in his brain, and when he was compelled to seek relief by the splitting open of his cranium with Vulcan's axe. This is the real reason, says FOLLY, with charming irony, they twist so many caps round their learned heads; protecting bands are needed to prevent the spilling of their brains consequent upon the bursting of the barriers of bone and flesh and skin. They expect the utmost deference, for is not each divine MAGISTER NOSTER? That is the way ordinary folk must address them, remembering the capital letters. "And should any man chance to transpose the words and say *noster magister* instead of *magister noster*, they will at once revile him as a pestilent heretic and an enemy of the faith."

The theologians thus satirised, FOLLY bestows attention upon the monks. "It will be interesting to hear what they have to say when they are called to answer for their lives at the bar of God. One will make the most of his fish-eating and boast how in this way he kept under his body; another will relate how that psalm-singing was his one constant



PSALM-SINGING FRIARS

occupation; a third will tot up the number of his fast days; a fourth will recount the rites and ceremonies he has performed; a fifth will point to the fact that he never once during a long life of threescore years soiled his fingers by the touch of filthy lucre—when handling silver he always wore gloves of thickest leather; a sixth, in proof of humility, will exhibit his holy hood, a piece of headgear so foul that a sailor wouldn't dream of using it in a storm, though nothing else lay to his hand; a seventh will recall how he has lived the life of a sponge for fifty years, never changing his hut all that time; another will whisper that he has spent his voice in hymn-singing and anthems; another will say that he has suffered a stroke owing to the severe habit of his life; and the last will somehow intimate that he has lost the faculty of speech by non-use, thus ensuring obedience to the command not to offend with the tongue. But Jesus will brush aside every sophistical cobweb and make reply, 'Woe unto you, Scribes and Pharisees, hypocrites, you I know not; I asked but one thing at your hands, that ye should love one another as I have loved you, and this command no one tells me he has obeyed. . . . As many of you as rely upon the bruised reeds of your own deserts may seek a new heaven, for there is no place for you in that blest abode which has been prepared from the foundations of the earth for the pure in heart alone.'"

Folly's quiver is not yet exhausted and she now lets fly sharpened arrows at the pulpit of her day. Preachers strike attitudes like men on the stage. They inflect the voice to perfection, now rising, now falling. They intone, and shout, and sing, and squeak, and twist the countenance with the ease of born comedians. They quote from their doctors invincible, doctors subtle, doctors seraphic, doctors cherubic, doctors holy, doctors irrefragable. They trot out their syllogisms, their majors and minors, their conclusions, corollaries, inferences, distinctions ; they wind up with some farcical story which they interpret allegorically, tropologically, anagogically. In illustration of the pulpit method then in vogue the outline of a discourse preached by a grave divine on the name JESUS is given. As the word is inflected only in three cases, it teaches the doctrine of the Trinity ! As the nominative case ends in the letter S it implies that Christ is the *summus,* or beginning of all things ; as the accusative ends in M it may be inferred that Christ is the *medius,* or centre of all things ; and as the ablative ends in U it may be concluded that He is also the *ultimus,* or end. Then, if the word JESUS is divided into two equal parts the letter S is left alone in the middle, and seeing that the Hebrew pronunciation of this letter is *syn* the inference is that Jesus is the One who should save His people from their sins !

As to the Popes of Rome who claim to be Christ's

vicars, FOLLY declares—one wonders how she dare—that they, unlike their Lord, fare sumptuously every day, outdoing temporal princes in the splendour of their equipages. All the work appertaining to their office they delegate to St. Peter or to St. Paul, who have abundance of time to mind it; all the pleasure and glory they appropriate unto themselves. It would be antiquated to work miracles, too much of a task to teach, a trespass upon the Schoolmen's preserves to interpret the Scriptures, sheer idleness to pray, unmanly to weep. Nor could they be expected to fast—that were too unpleasant—or to prove themselves affable and friendly, this would be beneath the dignity of a Potentate who would not suffer, without special permission, even princes to kiss his toe. The prospect of death for Christ's sake, say crucifixion, could not for one moment be entertained; such a course would be madness. In conclusion, FOLLY begs to be excused if she has gone too far in self-praise. Her hope is that all who read her words will bear in mind the speaker's name and sex. They will then pardon her apparent rudeness and immodesty. At the same time they may recollect, and with benefit apply, the old Greek proverb, "*A fool oft speaks a seasonable truth*".

Never in the history of religion has satire cut so clean and so deep. People everywhere bought up the work; 20,000 copies were disposed of in the

course of a few weeks. The sustained character of its popularity may be judged from the fact that no fewer than forty-three editions appeared during the author's lifetime and that subsequent editions are legion. Ordinary readers saw what the monks failed at first to perceive, that a man had been busy—to use the expression of Dorpius—fitting their heads with asses' ears. Leo X. read the book through without resentment and laughingly said that the writer too had his own niche in the Temple of Folly. When the monks at length woke up to the fact that they were the butt of the world they screamed their loudest and, finally, some six years later, succeeded in worming out of Erasmus an explanatory, and in part apologetic, letter addressed to Dorpius, their chosen champion. The Sorbonne condemned the work in 1542 and placed it upon the *Index Expurgatorius*: a sure indication of its bite and power.

CHAPTER VIII

THE GREEK NEW TESTAMENT AND THE PARAPHRASES —THE "DE COPIA"—THE "LIVING" OF ALDINGTON—RELIC HUNTING

DURING the five years (1509-1514) of his third sojourn in England Erasmus completed a still more important work—the Greek New Testament. Towards the close of his second year at Cambridge he wrote to inform Dean Colet that he had finished his collation of the New Testament, and was turning his attention seriously to the works of Jerome. The first edition of *The New Instrument,* as Erasmus chose to call it, was not published until 1st March, 1516, but the greater part of the work was made ready for the press at this time. Cambridge accordingly rightly shares with the famous publisher John Froben, of Basel, the honour of its publication.

It is difficult, in these days, to realise the wonder of this monumental work. The Greek Text of the Complutensian Polyglot, though printed some two years before the appearance of Erasmus's Greek Testament, was not published until March, 1520, at which date Erasmus's *second* edition was in circulation. Froben and Erasmus are therefore entitled

to the distinction of having issued the *editio princeps* of the Greek New Testament. Biblical criticism was then in its infancy; there were scores, Dean Farrar says "thousands," of theologians who did not know whether the Apostles wrote in Hebrew, or Greek, or Latin. A certain priest thought that Greek and the New Testament were two recent heresies! In the person of Erasmus "Greece rose from the dead with the New Testament in her hand". "If you would drink deeply of the well-springs of wisdom," said Erasmus on one occasion to a young girl, "apply yourself to the study of Greek. The Italians have only shallow rivulets; the Greeks copious rivers running over sands of gold. Read Plato, he wrote on marble with a diamond; but above all, read the New Testament. It is the key to the kingdom of heaven." In publishing his *Novum Instrumentum* with Latin translation and notes, Erasmus confessed that his aim was to revive the knowledge of the original, and by the collation of available MSS. to furnish as correct a version as possible of the text. He claimed the right to apply to the Authorised Version of his day, the Vulgate, the same rules of criticism as scholars were wont to apply to the writings of Cicero and of Virgil. In his preface to Laurentius Valla's *Notes on the New Testament* (1505), he had said: "If men give heed to Nicolas Lyranus when he ventures to criticise Jerome of old, . . . in what consists the

sin of Laurentius, if, having collated a few early and authentic Greek *MSS.*, he calls attention to some passages of the New Testament which in the original Greek either deviate from our version or appear to be inadequately translated . . . or find a more expressive setting in the original tongue, or, lastly, if it is evident that some portions of our text are corrupt? It may in all likelihood be said that Valla, the grammarian, cannot pursue the same course as Nicolas, the theologian. I may answer that Laurentius is held in repute amongst the learned both as a philosopher and a theologian. But, setting this fact aside, when Lyranus analyses an expression is he the theologian, or is he the grammarian? The truth is the translation of Scripture is perforce the work of the grammarian . . . and if we cannot look upon Grammar as the first of the Sciences, we must admit that it has an important function to fulfil. . . . If it was possible for errors to creep into the Old Testament Version, particularly as respects matters not vital to the faith, may not the same thing happen in the case of the New Testament? . . . And are we to place human errors at the door of the Divine Spirit? Even should scholars succeed in making a faultless version, that which has been correctly rendered may be tampered with. Jerome revised, and yet his new version has already become corrupted. . . . But it is not permissible, some contend, to alter Holy Writ, seeing that the

very points have their own special significance. This only goes to prove how criminal it is to wrest them, and how careful the learned should be to correct the errors of the ignorant, always manifesting, of course, that reverent and cautious scholarship which all books, and especially the Sacred Scriptures, have the right to demand. . . . Should some one say that it is beneath the dignity of theology to be hampered by syntactical rules, and that the interpretation of Holy Writ is a matter of inspiration, I reply that a new claim is thus advanced in the behalf of theologians if it is to be their privilege alone to write nonsense. . . . But I am reminded that the ancient translators were men of learning and that their version is sufficient for all practical purposes. I answer that I have eyes of my own and choose to use them in preference to borrowing the spectacles of others, and further, that much yet remains to be done when the gains of scholarship have been reckoned up at their highest figure." The principles of the "Higher Criticism" are clearly no modern discovery, they were recognised and worked upon by Reuchlin, and Valla, and Erasmus, four and a half and five centuries ago. Judged in the light of present-day scholarship Erasmus's New Testament is in many points defective; the manuscripts to his hand were comparatively few and recent and not in every instance accurately read, but it would ill become us to

quarrel with pioneer work, accomplished amidst apparently insuperable difficulties and at such cost of time and brain.

The work was dedicated to Leo X. and at once commanded a ready sale. Two editions of 3,300 folio copies were exhausted in three years. The people welcomed eagerly a version sufficiently modern and simple to meet their needs. In the preface Erasmus had said: "I altogether and utterly dissent from those who are unwilling that the Holy Scriptures, translated into the vulgar tongue, should be read by private persons, as though the teachings of Christ were so abstruse as to be intelligible only to a few theologians, or as though the safety of Scripture rested on man's ignorance of it. It may be well to conceal the mysteries of kings; but Christ willed that His mysteries should be published as widely as possible. I wish that even the weakest woman should read the Gospel—should read the Epistles of Paul. I long that the husbandman should sing portions of them to himself as he follows the plough, that the weaver should hum them to the tune of his shuttle, that the traveller should beguile with their stories the tedium of his journey."

Consternation fell upon orthodox circles when Erasmus's New Testament was seen passing from hand to hand. To tamper with the Vulgate, the Latin translation of Jerome, was in their eyes to

tamper with and correct the Holy Ghost. "It cannot be," it was said, "that the unanimous universal Church which has always used the Vulgate version, has been for so many centuries mistaken. Many will turn sceptics if they learn that even one jot or tittle in the Holy Scriptures is false; and then will come to pass what Augustine described to Jerome, 'If any error should be admitted to have crept into the Holy Scriptures, what authority would be left to them?'" But Erasmus, intent upon buying the truth, was not prepared to sell it owing to the alarms of an ignorant priesthood. He would set down his "findings" however unpopular they might prove to be. Annotating 1 Cor. vii. 39; 2 Cor. x. 8; 1 Tim. i. 7, he rejects the exegetic infallibility of the Pope and Churches. Writing on the word μυστηριον in Eph. v. 32 he denies that it furnishes proof that marriage is a sacrament, a doctrine which he accepts not on Scriptural grounds, but purely in deference to tradition. He points out the late origin of the dogma of transubstantiation, and rejects as spurious the verse about "the three witnesses" which the latest revisers of the New Testament have eliminated from the 1st Epistle of John (v. 7).[1] He holds

[1] This verse was inserted by Erasmus in his *Third* Edition, after a Greek *MS.* containing the words had come in his way. At the same time he was careful to point out, in a note, that this one *MS.* did not convince him of the genuineness of the text.

that the Gospel of Mark is an abridgment of that of Matthew, that the Epistle to the Hebrews was not the work of St. Paul but of an unknown writer—perhaps Clement of Rome. He emphasises the fact that Christ is the Truth and that He alone in His teaching is wholly free from error ; occasional failure of judgment and lapses of memory on the part of Apostles are to be expected.

Five editions of the New Testament were issued during the lifetime of Erasmus, each edition, the first excepted, being filled out with paraphrases, mere verbal padding from the standpoint of twentieth-century knowledge, but acceptable commentary in the view of Biblical students of those days. It was the author's aim "to supply gaps, to soften the abrupt, to arrange the confused, to simplify the involved, to untie the knotty, to throw light on the obscure, to give the Roman franchise to Hebraisms . . . to say the same things in another way". In 1547 a copy of the Paraphrases of the Gospels in English was set up in every Parish Church in England by order of Edward VI.

Other literary projects advanced during this period were the Jerome edition, afterwards published in nine folio volumes by the Froben Press, and the text-book on rhetoric, entitled, *De duplici copia verborum et rerum.* By *copia* (literally "wealth," "abundance") Erasmus understands variety and fulness of language, not a hotch-potch of words and

phrases. Suppose a preacher, for example, takes as text the words, "Create in me a clean heart, O God" and thus comments, "Create in me a clean heart, a pure heart, a heart without spot, a heart unstained, a heart in which no mean thing can be found, a heart untainted, a heart cleansed, a heart purged, a heart white as snow,"—this kind of *copia*, remarks Erasmus, is nothing but empty gibble-gabble. The one rule always to be observed is to find words appropriate to the subject, "words apt and choice and pure". Style is to thought as clothing is to the body. It is a mistake to imagine that words are of no account in themselves so long as the speaker's meaning is conveyed. The thought should be expressed in such a way as to assert at once its inherent power over the mind. "All writing should be sweetened by the Attic charm."

The first edition of this work was published on 29th April, 1511, and was dedicated to Colet, at whose request the book was written. The Dean of St. Paul's had recently founded a school for the free education of 153 children, and the *Copia* was prepared to serve as a class-book on Latin composition for his pupils. The friendship between Erasmus and the Dean was evidently kept in good repair. Men must be on the best of terms with each other when they launch out into frank correspondence upon ways and means. "I am so greatly indebted to the Archbishop," writes Erasmus, "that I cannot

in conscience take another penny from him, even if he held it out to me. I begged something from N—— with as brazen a forehead as one need desire, but he said 'no' with equal shamelessness. Why even Linacre, dear fellow, imagines that I am impudent overmuch and urges me to pass by the Archbishop and Mountjoy and to exercise myself in thrift and in the grace of patience, and yet he knows all the time that I am in wretched health and that when I left London on the threshold of winter I had only six angels to bless myself with. Truly the advice of a friend! The fact is I kick at my unhappy lot mainly because it gives me no chance of cultivating the virtue of modesty." The Archbishop to whom reference was made in the foregoing letter was William Warham, of Canterbury, by whose favour the "living" of Aldington in Kent had fallen into Erasmus's hands. At first Erasmus demurred owing to his ignorance of the English language and, consequently, his inability to preach or render an equivalent of service. Warham easily overcame his scruples, such as they were, by the argument that he would thus be set free to devote himself without financial distraction to the writing of books, a service far greater in his case than that of preaching to a handful of countryfolk. The argument was clenched by the pledge that the parish should not suffer by this arrangement, but that a competent assistant should be employed to engage in the cure of souls.

Erasmus accepted the position only to send in his resignation within a month or so, receiving in exchange a pension of £20 per year. Warham was most generous in patronage; "He could not have been kinder," says Erasmus, "if he had been my father or my brother".

John Fisher, Bishop of Rochester, was another patron not to be despised. It was mainly owing to his influence that the Lady Margaret Professorship of Divinity at Cambridge fell to Erasmus, and later the Greek chair.

In the midst of the more serious pursuits of study and teaching several diversions were enjoyed. A ride to Richmond was made memorable by the pleasant deceit of a friend. Journeying under a cloudless sky one of the company suddenly stopped, stared into the heavens and made the sign of the cross, uttering the while exclamations of surprise. Asked what he saw, he again crossed himself and replied, "May a most merciful God turn aside this prodigy!" Urged to explain, he lifted his eyes fixedly into the sky, pointed to a particular part of it and said, "Cannot you see that large dragon there with horns of flame and tail hooped into a circle?" When they, each in turn, had answered "no," he asked them to look again, and yet again, indicating with his finger the exact position of the heavenly dragon. Finally, one of the company, dreading to be thought shortsighted or blockish,

announced that he saw the vision. The members of the party, one after another, in quick succession, shouted their *Eureka* too, and within three days word ran through the land that this remarkable portent had shown itself in the sky. The report lost nothing by the telling.

Visits were also made to the shrine of the Virgin at Walsingham and to that of Thomas à Becket at Canterbury. The former chapel, which dates back to the twelfth century, enjoyed the reputation of being an exact copy of the Sancta Casa at Nazareth. On the fall of Nazareth it was noised abroad that the Virgin had forsaken her home in the Holy Land and had taken up her abode at the Walsingham shrine, a rumour which was afterwards "improved" by the story that the sanctuary in this little Norfolk town was the Sancta Casa itself removed from Palestine. The journey to this home of "our Lady" was, on this account, one of the most popular of English pilgrimages. Erasmus appears to have immensely enjoyed his visit to this famous shrine, the verger was so entertaining a guide. A doorway was shown, and so narrow and low was it that a man could, with difficulty, scramble through on his hands and knees. An armed knight, however, after invoking the aid of the Blessed Virgin, had passed through on horseback leaving his pursuers discomfited without! "And did the knight get folk to swallow this marvellous story?" asked

Erasmus of the guide. In reply the verger pointed to a brass plate on which was engraved a likeness of the knight dressed in the peculiar garb of his day. "Proof positive," muttered the incredulous visitor as he lifted his eyebrows and moved away. The joint of a man's finger was another exhibit—"St. Peter's"—said the guide. The bone was large enough to have been part of a giant's hand and Erasmus quietly remarked, "Peter must have been a hulk of a fellow". The relic most prized was a small quantity of the Virgin's milk preserved in a glass globe. To the questioning eyes of Erasmus it looked like chalk mixed with the white of an egg.[1]

The visit to Canterbury was made in company with the Dean of St. Paul's. The friends saw—and kissed—the point of the sword with which Thomas à Becket was slain, the pierced skull itself, and the hair shirt and the girdles with which the saint used to crucify his flesh. "An immense quantity of bones, skulls, chins, hands, teeth, fingers and entire arms were brought out to us,

[1] This visit to Walsingham took place in 1511. The *Colloquy*, "Peregrinatio Religionis ergo," in which Erasmus describes his experiences, did not appear until 1524; and though one of its most pungent passages—the exposure of the learned ignorance of theologians who had vainly wiped their spectacles in the attempt to construe his Greek verses to the Virgin, verses which they pronounced to have been written in the Hebrew or Aramaic tongue—would lead us to suppose that a second visit was paid during the interim of twelve years, there is no evidence to this effect.

all of which we devoutly kissed!" An exception was made in the case of the martyr's handkerchiefs. The Prior, thinking to honour his illustrious visitor, offered Colet one of these precious relics. The Dean lifted the rag with his finger-tips, an expression of concentrated disgust upon his face, and then let it drop with an "ugh!" and a whistle.

It is clear that the practice of relic-worship was, in the eyes of Erasmus, a superstition to laugh at. Certain devout minds, however, might be assisted in worship by a sight of these sacred things, fictitious and real, and in deference to these "weaker brethren" it would not be safe, he thought, to reform the practice away. The ostrich, it is said, can digest metals and swallow even red-hot iron without harm; and there were credulous believers, a great multitude, who could "take in" the most extraordinary stories and build them up into their spiritual experience. Erasmus was not blessed with this ostrich capacity; he always found difficulty in "swallowing" anything—except wine; at the same time he recognised the fact that many persons enjoyed and profited by the incredible. The liberty he claimed for himself he was ready to grant unto others; a characteristic all too rarely found in Apostles of Freedom.

CHAPTER IX

THE "COMPLAINT OF PEACE"—THE "FAMILIAR COLLOQUIES"

JOHN FROBEN, of Basel, was responsible for the departure of Erasmus from England in the summer of 1514. An editor was required for the works of Jerome: Erasmus was Froben's man; a publisher was also wanted for the Greek New Testament: Froben was Erasmus's man. During the next three years we find him thrice in England, twice at Basel, once at Louvain and once at Brussels. Unfriendly contemporaries dubbed him "that gadabout" and said that scholarship was impossible to a mortal of such restless wing. The bird replied that he always took care to flit for the best of reasons and that he contrived, somehow or other, to gather sustenance from every field

Honours now fell upon him thick and fast. Duke Ernest of Bavaria invited him to Ingoldstadt University; a bishopric in Sicily was offered to him; Francis I., according to report, wanted him to head a new school of learning in France. Charles I. of Spain (afterwards Emperor Charles V.)

appointed him one of his counsellors, an honour which was acknowledged by the dedication of the treatise *Institutio Principis Christiani*, an essay on the duties of Christian princes in the government of the people. For the hundredth time Erasmus inveighs in these pages against war. "Everybody may see that wars lead to wars, one conflict treading on the heels of another, and that without pause or end. It has been demonstrated over and over again that the gain of all such upheavals is *nil*, and on this account I hold that some other way out of difficulty should be found." The suggested way is—arbitration. "Why not call in the aid of your bishops and abbots, your men of learning and jurisprudence? By an appeal to their judgment one would have far more hope of setting crooked things straight than by resorting to murder and plunder and widespread calamity."

About this time—1516—*The Complaint of Peace* (*Querela pacis undique gentium ejectae profligataeque*) was issued from the Froben Press. The opening sentences contain a tremendous philippic against war. Peace speaks in her own person: "If I, Peace, am extolled at one and the same time by God and man, as the fountain, the source, the nurse, the patroness, the guardian of every good thing in heaven and in earth; if apart from me nothing anywhere prospers, nothing is safe, nothing is pure or holy, nothing is either

delightful to man or well pleasing to God; if, on the other hand, war is, briefly, a veritable ocean containing evils of any and every kind; if at its coming things that were flourishing begin to wither, things that were developing are arrested by decay, things that were established totter to the fall, things that were made to endure utterly perish, and things sweet at length become bitter; if war is an unhallowed thing to the extent that it is the deadliest bane of all piety and religion; if there is nothing more deleterious to men or more abhorrent to heaven, I ask, in the name of the ever-living God, who can believe that those rational creatures possess any soundness of mind at all who expend such vast wealth, waste such enthusiasm, enter upon undertakings so great, expose themselves to so many perils in the endeavour to drive me away from them and to purchase at so high a price so appalling an array of sorrows? If those beings who thus treat me were beasts of the field, the reproach could more easily be borne; in that case I should put such contumely down to Nature which had inwrought so pitiless a disposition. If dumb creatures regarded me as an object of hatred I could pardon their ignorance seeing that they are denied the powers of mind necessary to the recognition of my unique gifts. But it is a fact at once shameful and marvellous that though Nature has formed only one animal endowed with reason,

capable of the thought of God, one that is innately benevolent and sympathetic, yet I can more readily find tolerance amongst the wildest of wild beasts and the most brutal of brutes than amongst men."

With the one pitiable exception that we have named,[1] Erasmus is consistent in his opposition to the war fever of his time, and frequently his words are at white-heat. The sight of armies waving on the field banners stamped with a cross draws from him the exclamation, "What! is cross pitted against cross, Christ at war with Christ? Can impiety further go?" Princes might engrave upon their weapons images of the saints and christen their guns by the names of Apostles, but they would not succeed in making sacred so iniquitous a traffic in the bodies and souls of men.

The *Querela Pacis* was suggested by a conjunction of circumstances that wear quite a modern aspect. The Hague Conference of recent years has been followed by war and rumours of war. A similar Conference, it appears, was planned at the beginning of the sixteenth century. "It was a favourite project," writes Erasmus, "to assemble a congress of kings at Cambrai. It was to consist of Maximilian the Emperor, Francis I., King of France, Henry VIII. of England, and Charles, the Sovereign of the Low Countries, of which I am a native. They were to enter, in the most solemn

[1] *Vide* page 76.

manner, into mutual and indissoluble engagements to preserve peace with each other and consequently peace throughout Europe. This momentous business was very much promoted by a man of most excellent character, William à Ciervia; and by one who seemed to have been born to advance the happiness of his country and of human nature, John Sylvagius, Chancellor of Burgundy. But certain persons who get nothing by peace and a great deal by war threw obstacles in the way and prevented this truly kingly purpose from being carried into execution. After this great disappointment I sat down and wrote, by desire of John Sylvagius, my *Querela Pacis*, or *Complaint of Peace*. Since that day, things have been growing worse and worse; and it seems to me I shall soon have to compose the Epitaph of Peace instead of voicing her complaint, as she seems to be dead and buried and not likely to come out of her grave." [1] In his dedicatory preface to Philip of Burgundy, Bishop of Utrecht, Erasmus writes: "You and I have lately seen how that certain persons . . . have left no stone unturned in their attempts to frustrate the plans of those whose aim it is to put an end to all war. . . . It was this shameful intrigue that led me to compose my *Complaint of Peace Everywhere Despised*, a treatise which gave me the

[1] Quoted by T. Paynell in his Preface to *The Complaint of Peace* (1802).

opportunity of at once speaking my mind and easing my conscience."

We have had occasion in the course of this work to make several quotations from the *Familiar Colloquies*, the most popular of Erasmus's writings, and therefore a passing reference will now suffice. The book grew from small beginnings in 1518, (perhaps earlier), when the first edition was published, to the larger editions of 1523 and 1530. Hearing that the book was likely to be condemned by the University of Paris, one publisher at once ran off an edition of 24,000 copies. The fifty or sixty conversational sketches that made up the work dealt with subjects that came home to "the businesses and bosoms" of men in every rank of society, *e.g.*, "Family Discourse," "Rash Vows," "Benefice Hunting," "The Soldier's Confession," "Hunting and Fishing," "The Lover and Maiden," "On Speaking Untruthfully," "The Shipwreck," "Concerning Faith," "The Alchemist," "The Horse-Cheat," "Things and Words," "The Assembly or Parliament of Women," "Concerning Early Rising," "Concerning Friendship," "The Sermon," "The Epicurean," "The Pilgrimage," etc., etc. Professor Saintsbury in his latest work[1] has pointed out the place of these dialogues in the evolution of the drama and the novel. Several of the colloquies are referred to as "novel-

[1] *The Earlier Renaissance*, pp. 82-83.

chapters"; it is hinted that Defoe was indebted to "The Shipwreck" for some of his most vivid passages, while "The Poetical Banquet" is styled a "Scene of Literary Life" three hundred years older than the nineteenth century. We have noted[1] the debt of one of our own novelists to the colloquy on "The Inns". The book might be sub-titled "Studies in Realism". When and where did Erasmus examine the fashion plates of his day? "Our honour, ladies," orates the fair President of "The Parliament of Women," "consists mainly in dress, but so hopelessly confused are we with regard to these things that a duchess can hardly be distinguished from the wife of a tradesman, or married women from single girls. . . . Every one wears what clothing she pleases. Women that are next door to being paupers walk out decked in velvet and silks . . . in gold and silver, . . . while their husbands stop at home to clean the shoes. They cover their fingers with emerald and diamond rings—for nobody now thinks anything at all of pearls—to say nothing about their amber and coral necklaces and their fancy slippers. At one time of day it was deemed sufficient if women in middle-class life could indulge themselves in the luxury of a silk band, or a petticoat smartened up with ribbons; not so now. Accordingly the evil of present-day fashion is twofold; extravagance

[1] *Vide* page 82.

brings families to want, and all lines of distinction between the upper and the lower ten are blurred.

"If everybody's wife is to be driven about in flashy vehicles, upholstered with rare and costly fittings, what shall royalty do? If the wife of a country squire is to be permitted to go sweeping along with a train of some fifteen ells long, what in the world can a poor duchess or countess do? But to speak of something even more reprehensible; we are everlastingly altering the fashion, fickle creatures that we are. Not long ago our caps were mounted on wires, and this was a sure mark of distinction between the lady of quality and the common herd. Again, so that the distinction might be more pronounced still, caps of ermine were worn, dotted all over with black spots. But everybody was soon to be seen with them. The fashion was changed again; black caps were worn; but my lady of the streets not only adopted the new style but went one better, by setting off her head-gear with trimmings of gold and even with some sort of bejewelled ornaments. The quality used to put up their hair into a pinnacle, sheer from the forehead, but they could not long enjoy the custom; every girl began to do likewise. Then they wore the hair flattened down upon the brow; but the same thing happened again.

"There was a day when every lady could command her own gentleman attendants, when she

could always rely upon some one taking her hand when she rose from her seat, or placing her left arm within his right when she went out a-walking, —but—mark you—this honour fell to the lot of gentlemen alone. Now—the commonalty, aping this fashion, allow any sort of a fellow to assist and to carry their train too!

"In days gone by only persons of noble birth greeted each other with a kiss. They did not suffer any and everybody to kiss them, not even to press their lips upon the hand. In these days, however, a tanner smelling of leather essays often to kiss the hand of a lady of high degree. Why, even in matrimonial matters there is scarce any sense of decency—noblemen's daughters are united to tradesmen's sons, and the daughter of a shopkeeper to the son of a belted earl. . . .

"Nor can you find a young woman, let her birth be never so humble, who would hesitate to avail herself of the same cosmetics as the aristocracy use, whereas people of limited means ought to content themselves with a little ale-yeast, or the juice of a tree after it has been barked, or any like cosmetic of small cost; expensive dyes and ointments should be the indulgence of the gentry alone. . . .

"But [changing the subject] we have a bone to pick with the men too. They shut us out from all honourable employments and regard us in the light of washerwomen and cooks, while they have

control of everything and do pretty much as they have a mind. We will consent to their administration of public affairs and of all military matters. But can we sit down meekly to the blazoning of a wife's device upon the *left* side of the armorial shield, especially when her family may be as honourable again as that of her husband's? . . . Who can tell if we may not some day so assert ourselves as that we shall be allowed to take our share in the management of the affairs of the State —I refer, of course, to those questions which admit of settlement on the hearthstone and without arms."

The "new woman," it seems, is at least four centuries old.

In these delightful dialogues there is scarcely a Romish superstition which is not held up to ridicule and treated with open scorn. What raillery can be imagined more penetrating than the description given of the Franciscans in "The Seraphic Funeral"? None should make an ill end who died in a Franciscan's habit. "I was once at Antwerp," says one of the speakers in this colloquy, "and was present in the company of the relatives of a woman who lay at the point of death. With us was a Franciscan, a most reverend man, who, observing the woman to gasp for breath, took her arm and thrust it into the sleeve of his habit covering the arm and part of

the shoulder as well. Thereupon a discussion arose as to whether the whole woman would be saved from hell or only that part of her body which had been shielded by the sleeve." The devils, we are further told, have an unspeakable horror of the Franciscan habit, they stand in greater awe of it than they do of the Cross of Christ. As a snake will not come near the shadow of an ash let it spread wide as it may, so demons are sensible of the venom of the holy garment even at great distances. The dress, if worn, would save a Turk, nay, Satan himself!

In the dialogue entitled "Ichthyophagia" the Pontifical Laws are said to require things more burdensome than the ceremonial laws of the Jews, while at the same time moral laws are strangely subverted. "If a priest lets his hair grow or wears the dress of a layman, he is imprisoned and severely punished, but if he gets drunk and never opens his Bible, he is still a Pillar of the Church. . . . If he neglects to mutter prayers at certain hours he is excommunicated, but if he be a usurer, or guilty of simony, no one has a word to say. If one should see a Carthusian in a habit not of his order, or eating flesh, what curses he heaps upon him . . . but let the same person see our friend helplessly intoxicated, reviling his neighbour or playing tricks upon the poor, and he finds nothing to startle him. If any one sees a Franciscan wearing a girdle with-

out knots, or an Augustinian girt with a woollen one instead of a leathern one, or a Carmelite without one at all, or a Rhodian with one . . . will he not set the whole town in an uproar? . . . If a sick man should taste a bit of chicken Christianity is imperilled." The *Familiar Colloquies*, the *Praise of Folly* and Pascal's *Les Provinciales* should stand shoulder to shoulder on library shelves.

The work was condemned by the University of Paris in 1528, and subsequently enrolled upon the *Index Expurgatorius*. The author, it was said, "acts the part of a heathen and ridicules, satirises and sneers at the Christian religion and its holy ceremonies and rites". Luther also pronounced an adverse judgment: "Under assumed names Erasmus teaches many impious things and sets himself against the Church and the Christian faith". Luther goes on to say that he would rather die than allow the book to fall into the hands of his children. The *Colloquies* were not written for children, but for men of nerve. Occasionally the author lapses into coarseness, but considering the dangerous character of some of the topics discussed and the realistic licence of the age, one wonders that objectionable phrases are not more abundant. As a mirror of the religious world of the early sixteenth century the *Colloquies* are of special value, and no student of the times can afford to ignore them.

CHAPTER X

ERASMUS AND THE REFORMATION

Erasmus had now attained, as had been prophesied, "the topmost pinnacle of letters". He stood apart from his fellows, confessedly the greatest scholar of his age. "No contemporary Italian humanist had so great a reputation: he was recognised on both sides of the Alps as the literary chief of Europe. . . . There has been no such literary reputation since; for with the disuse of Latin as the universal language of educated men passed away the possibility of a single Republic of Letters. England never acknowledged the supremacy of Voltaire; France never found out the greatness of Goethe. But before the sickly scholar of Basel—throwing on every controversy of the age the light of his genius and his learning . . . all Europe bowed." [1]

It had been well, perhaps, had Erasmus's life story ended at this hour. The strenuous day of the Reformation was at hand and the world

[1] Beard's *Hibbert Lectures* (1883), page 65 (2nd ed.).

demanded of its leaders something more than jests and raillery. Luther, roused to indignation by the trade in pardons openly carried on by the Holy See stepped forward as the champion of the primitive faith. On the 31st of October, 1517, the famous ninety-five theses were nailed upon the church door at Wittenberg. It is impossible, he cried, that a slip of paper signed by the Pope can take away sins. Who can forgive sins but God only?

The Pope, however, had heard such things before. It is a mistake to think that the world was being startled with undreamed of revelations. Petrarch and Boccaccio and Chaucer and John Wessel had all uttered blunt and daring words. The Papal authorities had smiled—that was all. So deeply rooted in the Western mind was the idea of the one Holy Catholic Church that the protestations of serious men, concerned at the need for reform, were listened to, but not heeded. Let come what would come the Church would stand, the gates of Hades could not prevail against her. Of course the Church and Papal Christianity were regarded as synonymous terms. Bolstered in this pleasant confidence, the ecclesiastics of pre-Reformation and Reformation times failed to estimate the strength of the current that was setting in against them; they imagined that they could afford to ignore Luther's thunder and to hold their sides over the witticisms of Erasmus. The fact is a

subtle change had been passing over the Western world; intellectually and spiritually men were not as they were. The revival of letters, the invention of printing, especially the dissemination of the Scriptures, were slowly changing the atmosphere of Europe. Bonds of authority were being loosened in every sphere of human activity; religious, social, political. Men ventured to cultivate a sturdy independence of thought and character, to see things with their own eyes, to formulate and to state reasons for the truth that was in them. Long before Luther's day the democratic spirit began to assert itself in sacred as in civic affairs. The soil had been made ready for the Reformer's sowing, and Erasmus had done not a little of the work of the ploughshare. The hard clods of priestly arrogance and presumption would never have been broken had not the keenest of blades passed through them again and again.

What was Erasmus to do when Luther stepped firmly over the land that had been ploughed? The disgusting effrontery of the indulgence-vendors who told their audiences that, as the money clinked in the box, the souls of sinners were cleansed, was as intolerable to him as it was to Luther himself. Had he not for years been fighting Luther's battle? The young monk evidently thought so, and assured of the great man's sympathy, he ventured to set in order before him his hopes and ideals. In the

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month of March, 1519, a pleading letter passed between them. Luther seems to be overweighted with a sense of Erasmus's greatness. "It has come to my ears—Fabricius Capito has told me—that I am no stranger to you seeing that you have read some writing of mine on indulgences; and I am further informed that my ideas are not only familiar to you but also shared by you—in proof turn to your last preface to the *Enchiridion*—and these things being so I must needs acknowledge, however unworthily, the magnanimity of your heart towards me and all men. . . . Therefore, my dear and kindly Erasmus, should it seem wise in your eyes, greet this your younger brother in Christ, one of your hero-worshippers, but whose ignorance is such that he cannot presume to stand with you under the same sky and sun."

In reply Erasmus addresses Luther as a "brother beloved," and admits that his letter is "according to the mind of Christ". The advice he gives is, virtually, an exhortation on the text, "Let your moderation be known unto all men". More is to be gained by suavity and gentleness than by violence. "Let us see to it that we never say anything or do anything that bears the appearance of vainglory, or that is likely to be divisive in its effects. . . . Let us never allow our minds to be distorted by anger, or hatred, or pride. . . . I am not saying these things because I think you need

thus to be lectured but because I am desirous that you should continue on your present way. . . . May the Lord Jesus more abundantly bless you with His spirit day by day."

Courteous and even paternal as was the letter, it was not the answer Luther hoped to receive. He had asked for the bread of sympathy and co-operation; there was handed to him the stone of a sermon. The great man, it was clear, did not intend to stand by the young monk's side if he persisted in his determination to force the battle to the gate. It irritated him to find that men were coupling their names together. Rumour was afloat that the Lutheran tracts had been inspired, if they had not actually been written, by Erasmus himself. The theologians of Louvain, at which place Erasmus was now sojourning, were busy circulating this report. It would never do to allow himself to be saddled with the responsibility of everything Luther might say or do. The monks had generously credited him with the authorship of the *Dialogue of Julius II.* and the *Epistolæ obscurorum virorum,* a sharp and in some respects scurrilous attack upon the Schoolmen; some even went so far as to say that the *Utopia* was his work and not Sir Thomas More's, and now they wanted to trace the squibs and treatises of Luther to his pen. These gratuitous literary honours aroused a perilous popularity, and were heaped upon him, he had wit

enough to perceive, maliciously, in order to hasten the day of his undoing. If the monks could but succeed in getting Erasmus and Luther into the same boat, it would be a comparatively easy task, it was conceived, to sink them both together.

"In vain the net is spread in the sight of any bird." Erasmus counselled moderation; he told Luther himself that he had not yet found time to read any of his books, and he was careful to din this fact into the ears of every one who would listen. "Look you," he says in a letter to Cardinal Campeggio, the Papal legate to England, "how unkindly and outrageously some folk are serving me. . . . If a book is published the writer of which goes beyond the bounds of decency, they ascribe it to me. . . . Here is a work of Martin Luther, . . . I have not yet gone through the book, but they have persisted from the first in saying that I am the author, the fact being that I have not written a single line." The same disclaimer is made in a letter to Cardinal Wolsey. "Luther and I are complete strangers, nor have I found time yet to read more than a page or two of his writings, not that I lack the disposition to do so, but that my own affairs fill up every hour. Nevertheless I am told that certain persons are advertising that I have been his helper. . . . In all his books not the stroke of a letter is mine. . . . I am not indiscreet enough to lend my name to works I have never read, nor knavish enough to

denounce things concerning which I am in total ignorance." There are several able young men in Germany, he goes on to say, such as Eobanus, Hutten and Beatus, who give promise of great things in the world of letters and whose writings, he predicts, will some day give Germany as much occasion of boasting as England then enjoyed. Perhaps they carried their freedom of speech too far, but it must be remembered they had serious provocations. He had warned them again and again to guard against extremes, and especially to refrain from attacks on the dignitaries of the Church. "But of what avail is it? I can advise, but I cannot compel. I can ensure the moderation of my own pen, but I cannot be held responsible for other men's extremes. . . I have never yet written any work, nor do I intend ever to write any, without putting my name to it. A while ago I wrote for my own pleasure my *Moria;* perhaps I went a little too far in some of my expressions, but there was no malice behind. It has always been my aim to send forth nothing that would be likely to harm young people by its coarseness, or prove a stumbling block to religion, or occasion strife or sectarian bitterness, or injure the reputation of a brother. I have put forth all my powers hitherto in advancing the interests of learning and the religion of Christ. Everybody joins in thanking me, excepting the few monks and theologians who have no desire

either to add to their wisdom or knowledge. . . . Should any one take the trouble of investigating things he will find that Erasmus is upholding the Church of Rome with all his strength, in particular Leo X., in whose special debt he acknowledges that he stands."

We must turn, however, to a letter written on 1st November, 1519, to Albert, Archbishop of Mainz, if we would understand the standpoint of Erasmus, and the trend of the Lutheran movement as it appeared to him at that day. The letter is almost a treatise, but its importance demands that it should be given with the fewest abbreviations. "Luther is to me unknown as the most unknown of men. His writings I have not had time to read, excepting that I have just barely skimmed over some of them. If he has written well, no praise belongs to me, if not there is nothing which can be laid to my charge. . . . I was sorry that the books of Luther were published, and when first some writings or other of his began to be shown about, I did my best to prevent their publication, especially because I feared that some tumult would be caused thereby. Luther had written me a letter in what I thought a very Christian spirit and I answered, warning the man not to write anything seditious or insolent against the Roman Pontiff, but to preach the apostolic doctrine with pure heart and in all gentleness.

I did this politely that it might have the more effect. I added that there were some here who favoured him, that he might the more accommodate himself to their judgment. Now some have most stupidly interpreted these words as if I favoured Luther, whereas no one of those persons gave him any advice; I was the only one who warned him. I am neither the accuser of Luther, nor his patron, nor his judge. As to the man's spirit, I dare not judge him, for that is a most difficult matter, especially if I must judge him unfavourably.

"And yet, even if I did favour him as a good man, which his enemies admit him to be; or, as an accused man, and that the laws permit even to sworn judges; or, as a man oppressed and crushed down by those who, under some made-up pretext, are working all they can against pure learning, what ground of fault-finding against me were that, so long as I do not mix myself in the matter? In fine, it seems to me the part of a Christian to favour Luther, in this sense, that if he is innocent I do not wish him to be crushed by the factions of the wicked; if he is wrong I wish him to be set right, not ruined. . . . Men to whom gentleness is a duty seem to be simply thirsting for human blood, so eager are they to ensnare and ruin Luther. Now, this is playing the butcher, not the theologian. . . .

"Let us examine into the origin of the present

troubles. The world is burdened with human devices, with the opinions and the dogmas of the schools, with the tyranny of the Mendicant Friars, who, though they are the servants of the Holy See, are making themselves a danger to the Pope himself, and even to kings, by their power and their numbers. When the Pope is working for them he is more than a God; if he does anything contrary to their convenience, he is of no more account than a dream. I am not condemning them all; but very many are the kind of persons, who for the sake of power and gain are seeking to ensnare the consciences of men. With shameless effrontery they were beginning to leave out Christ entirely and to preach nothing but their own novel and impudent doctrines. About indulgences they were talking in a way that not even idiots could stand. . . . The whole of religion was turning towards more than Jewish ceremonialism. Good men grieved over all these things. Even theologians who are not monks, and some monks, confessed to them in private conversation. These are the things, as I think, which first moved the heart of Luther to set himself boldly against the intolerable insolence of certain persons. For what else can I suspect of a man who is aiming at neither honours nor wealth? . . .

"Luther dared to have doubts about indulgences, but others before him had made bold enough state-

ments about these. He dared to speak rather unrestrainedly about the authority of the Roman Pontiff; but others had shown little enough restraint in this matter, and among them especially Alvarus, Sylvester, and the Cardinal of San Sisto. He dared despise the judgment of St. Thomas, but the Dominicans had almost set Thomas above the Gospels. He dared in the matter of the confessional to discuss certain scruples, but in this thing the monks have entangled the consciences of men without limit. He dared in part to despise the conclusions of the schools; but they had laid far too great weight upon these, and yet cannot agree upon them among themselves, but are always changing them, cutting out the old and putting in the new. . . .

"When Luther's books came out they [his opponents] seized upon them as a handle and began to bring the cause of the languages, of sound learning, of Reuchlin, of Luther, nay, even my cause also, together into one bundle—making not only a bad exposition, but also a bad distinction. . . . They cry out against Reuchlin alone because he is an enthusiastic lover of the languages; against Luther because they imagine him to be endowed with our learning, whereas he has but just barely touched it. Luther has written many things rather rashly than wickedly, and among these things they are especially enraged because he has little respect

for Thomas Aquinas, because he is diminishing the revenue from indulgences, because he cares little for the begging friars, because he pays less respect to the dogmas of the schools than to the Gospels, because he takes no account of human argumentations about disputed points. Intolerable heresies these are! . . . Formerly he was a heretic who differed from the Gospels or the articles of faith or from something which had an authority equal to these. Now, if any one differ from Thomas, he is called a heretic; nay, if he differ from some new-fangled logic, patched up but yesterday by any sophist of the schools. Whatever they do not like, whatever they do not understand, is heresy! to know Greek is heresy! to speak correctly is heresy! whatever they do not do is heresy! I confess that the charge of violation of the faith is a serious one, but not any and every question ought to be turned into a question of faith. They who deal with matters of faith ought to be far removed from every form of ambition, of money-making, of personal hatred, or of revenge. But what these people are chiefly concerned with, who can be in doubt? If once the reins of their greed are let loose, they will begin everywhere to rage against every good man. . . . What I have said thus far has nothing to do with Luther's cause; I am speaking only of the manner and the danger of it. The case of Reuchlin the Pope has taken upon himself. Luther's business is

referred to the universities, and whatever they may decide is no risk of mine." [1]

The scope of this biography renders it impossible for us to follow, in detail, the mass of correspondence which has gathered round Luther and the Reformation. In letter after letter Erasmus professes sympathy with Luther's aims, distrust of revolutionary methods, and winds up with the declaration that the controversy is after all nothing to him. At length Ulrich Von Hutten, a Latin scholar of fighting instinct, attempted to goad Erasmus into taking sides one way or the other. Hutten was mainly responsible for the issue of that stinging satire the *Epistolæ obscurorum virorum*, and had thrown himself heart and soul into the work of the Reformation. Erasmus's non-committal attitude he could neither appreciate nor understand. "You have been doing your utmost," writes Hutten, with almost brutal bluntness, "to make Luther's opponents think that you had no intention whatever of defending the common good of the Christian world, whereas they knew all the time that you really believed the very opposite. . . . You know how delighted they are to hawk about with them correspondence of yours in which you take care to save your own precious neck, while you hold up others to blame

[1] *Vide* Emerton's *Life of Erasmus*, pp. 310-319.

at the same time. In like manner you have been denouncing the *Epistolæ obscurorum,* though there was a day when you sang their praises ; and you have poured out upon Luther the vials of your wrath because he has stirred up some things which ought to have been left alone, when you yourself have treated the same subjects in all your writings."

This letter, however, is comparatively bland when placed alongside the *Expostulatio cum Erasmo* which Hutten shortly afterwards issued from the press. In this remonstrance Erasmus is accused of being eaten up with ambition, of fickleness of mind, of cowardice and puling babyishness. If he comes out in his true character as a champion of Papal tyranny the Lutherans, Hutten tells him, will be ready to meet him. They wait for the battle, their hearts full of courage, knowing full well that they face only a maimed and indifferent adversary. "You will have to draw the sword more against your own genius and your own writings than against us."

This tremendous philippic was hurled against Erasmus in the spring of 1523 and considerably disturbed the literary peace he was then enjoying at Basel in the circle of his friend John Froben. An onslaught so fierce could not be ignored. A reply entitled, *Spongia Erasmi adversus Aspergines Hutteni,* (a sponge of Erasmus to wipe away the smears of Hutten) was written in hot haste—six days

—and published more at leisure. Hutten passed away five days before the famous "sponge" began to do its work. The note of the defence is the one Erasmus always and everywhere sounded on this thorny controversy. He was neither a Lutheran nor a Papist, in the sense of being a blind supporter of the Holy See and unfriendly to reform. He considered that the matter was a case for compromise and agreement. Luther, however, and his supporters, would not yield an inch; the theologians breathed only fire and fury. "If these things are to be, there is no need of such an one as I."

But the world *had* need of him, urgent need. This attitude of aloofness, superior neutrality, was offensive to both sides. Neither party could have confidence in a man who held both "Yes" and "No" in his pocket. To Hutten and his school he was an apostate, to Romanists a hypocrite. The play-actors at Augsburg who appeared before the Emperor Charles V. on his arrival at the Diet of 1530 cleverly hit off the situation. The action was in dumb show. A masked figure entered, robed in a doctor's gown, carrying a bundle of sticks, some straight, some crooked; these he threw down upon the stage and then walked away. As he turned to depart the spectators saw that he was labelled on his back "Johann Reuchlin". Then came a second "doctor," similarly robed, who set himself

the task of trying to make the crooked sticks square with the straight ones, but finding himself baffled, he flung himself into a temper and marched in dudgeon off the stage. This disconcerted divine was placarded "Erasmus Roterodamus". Next came the figure of a monk bringing fire, and in a minute the crooked sticks were all in a blaze. Every one knew before the monk turned to go that this was "Martin Luther". The fourth actor appeared in the robes of an emperor; drawing his sword he tried to separate the sticks and put out the fire, but only succeeded in making the flames leap higher. In great anger "Charles V." hastened away. Last of all, there advanced a figure in pontifical robe and with triple crown, who, seeing the conflagration, began despairfully to wring his hands, till, looking around for help, he saw two jars, one full of oil, the other of water, rushed at them, seized the oil jar by mistake, emptied it upon the fire, and raised such a blaze that he left the stage in manifest alarm. This was Pope Leo X.[1]

[1] *Vide Hibbert Lecture*, 1883, page 74. Mr. Charles Beard traces this story to a tract by J. L. Fabricius, first published at Heidelberg in 1663, and afterwards reprinted in Gronovius' *Thesaurus Græcarum Antiquitatum*, vol. viii., 1699. He also tells us that there is a curious record of a similar play performed before Francis I. in Paris in 1524, which was from the pen of Johann Lange, Prior of the Augustinian Convent, and afterwards Lutheran pastor at Erfurt. But the Paris play was not in dumb show, and both Hutten and a mendicant friar play a part in it.

The actors were right. Erasmus wanted to make the crooked sticks square with the straight ones. He advocated readjustment, mutual concession, rather than a radical reformation. Luther, on the other hand, saw that the sticks must be consigned to the flames. "It is idle," he writes, "for Erasmus to plead for harmony of belief on the principle that each party shall make concessions. In the first place, our opponents will not give way on anything. . . . As for us . . . we decline to countenance anything which contradicts Scripture. . . . There can be no peace, no compromise between the truth of God and the doctrine of devils."

The "idle" idea of a concord of faith reached by mutual concession was not a hurried mental device by means of which Erasmus hoped to thread his way through the mazes of the Reformation. Nearly twenty years before, in the *Enchiridion*, he had broached and elaborated his plan. "There ought to be a conference of able and pious men for the purpose of preparing a digest of the teaching of Christ from the untainted sources of the Gospels and the Epistles, and from the most reliable commentators. Matters of doctrine should be set forth in the fewest possible articles; matters of practice in like manner, as briefly as may be, and so phrased that men may see at a glance that the commandments of Christ are not grievous, but easy and pleasant. . . . It is madness to spoil the divine

philosophy of Christ with the traditions of men." The same note is struck again and again in later writings and in correspondence. "Do the will of Christ, leave dark mysteries alone." "Luther will pass away with the rest of us, but Christ abideth for ever." "The sum of religion is peace, which can only be when definitions are as few as possible, and opinion is left free on many subjects. Our present problems are said to be waiting for the next Œcumenical Council. Better let them wait till the veil is removed and we see God face to face." Erasmus suspected everything that bore the appearance of dogmatism. His dream was a return to early Christianity as it was before councils had formulated in clearly defined terms the Christian creed. If Luther's spirit of dogmatic assertiveness spread, dogma would clash against dogma, and the religious world would turn itself into an armed camp. This, Erasmus feared, would be the outcome of Lutheranism. Why not aim at a peaceful Reformation? Would not more be accomplished in the end? The world would gain if the Church set about a gradual reform within her borders, but lose, lose much, if reform meant revolution from without.

Were these convictions grounded in an intelligent view of history, and of the passions of the human mind, or were they the pale offshoots of the root cowardice? That Erasmus was constitutionally

timid is clear on his own confession. "Let others affect martyrdom, as for me I do not consider myself worthy of the honour." Quarrelling was so unpleasant an experience that truth herself, if she were seditious, would become, he declares, an object of hatred to him. The nerve of the warrior had been denied him. "It is not every man," Erasmus admits, "who has sufficient courage for martyrdom; I fear I should do as Peter did if I ever found myself in Peter's place." "In almost all plans of great enterprise," says John Foster, of strangely neglected memory, "a man must systematically dismiss at the entrance every wish to stipulate with his destiny for safety." Erasmus would have had a more honoured name in the history of the world if, while remaining true to his convictions, he had resisted all temptation to stipulate with his destiny. This he seemed unable to do. Always and everywhere self loomed before him. How will this turn of the wheel affect the fortunes of Erasmus? What will the powers that be think if Erasmus says this, if Erasmus does that? Like the little three-eyed girl in the German tale, mentioned by Mr. R. H. Hutton in his essay on "Goethe," Erasmus had always an extra organ besides the eyes he slept with and wept with, to take note of his own sleep and his own tears. Luther was delivered from the tyranny of this third and self-regarding eye. He counted not life dear to himself.

"What!" raged the cardinal legate at Augsburg, "do you think the Pope cares for the opinion of a German boor? The Pope's little finger is stronger than all Germany. Do you expect your princes to take up arms to defend *you*—*you*—a wretched worm like you? I tell you No! and where will you be then—where will you be then?" Luther answered, "Then, as now, in the hands of Almighty God".

Erasmus did not thus play the man. In pointing this contrast one must not commit the injustice of appraising one man by the character of another. "Every man must bear his own burden." The practice of judging Erasmus by what we know of *Luther*, instead of by what we know of *Erasmus*, appears to be a habit in which recent generations have confirmed themselves. We must remember not only his constitutional timidity, but the peculiar tenets he consistently held on questions of Christian faith and practice, if we would reach a sober estimate of the man in relation to the perplexing and sifting movement of his times.

We must admit, too, that if the build of his nature was unheroic, he was not destitute of *all* courage. The utterance of truths which excite the hatred of powerful and unscrupulous men is not the policy of the cowardly. No man was more honoured than Erasmus by pulpit anathemas. He was charged with having committed two of the three sins against

the Holy Ghost. A book was published by one Caranza entitled, *The Blasphemies and Impieties of Erasmus.* A recluse and book-lover, who is at the same time a coward, would have given a wide berth to the battlefields of his day, but Erasmus was not a scholar only, he was a man of the world. Admitting that his primary interest was literature, his secondary religion, the subordinate interest held over him powerful sway. He was a Churchman as well as a humanist and could not therefore confine himself to the cause of "pure letters". Other physicians, as we have noted, had laid their fingers on the wounds of the Church and had said, "*Thou ailest here and here,*" but Erasmus was more searching in his diagnosis than they all. The monks were not wide of the truth, after all, when they said that the Reformation was Erasmus's doing and that Luther had only hatched the egg which Erasmus had laid. It was of no avail that the retort was made that the egg laid was a hen's egg, whereas Luther had brought out a very different sort of bird. Orthodox Churchmen deemed Erasmus in the main the responsible person for all the revolt, and hated him accordingly. But through good report and through evil report he held firm to the guiding principle of a purified and simplified faith. "I should be telling an untruth," he writes to Alfonso Fonseca, Archbishop of Toledo, "if I made out that I was not pained by the way men

snap and snarl at me on every side; nevertheless, borne up by Christ, who will still the tempest by His very breathing, I have not yet succumbed to the weakness of the flesh and deserted my post, nor have I suffered myself to sink into despair." A coward would not exasperate opponents as Erasmus frequently goes out of his way to do. Recall, for example, his taunting epistle addressed to "certain most impudent jackdaws". "I spy out your little game, Brethren and Fathers; you have bribed certain young men, as impudent as they are ignorant, to make a concerted attack upon Erasmus and beat him down. . . . What a broken-down old sinner they imagine me to be! . . . At this very minute I am head over ears in work, and to this is to be traced, in the main, my physical weakness and any indications I may give of advancing age. Old man as I am, I bear unaided a burden which would bend four pair of strong, young shoulders. My eyes are not dim, God be praised. . . . I have not yet been obliged to use spectacles either by candle-light or by day. I never handle a stick. I walk straight-shouldered. My hands are steadier than those of a youth. . . . My intimate friends detect no lapses of memory. . . . And 'this decrepit old man' they have made up their minds to annihilate by their books. They should rather have chosen daggers; it matters not at all what weapon they use if they have the temper of assassins. Yet this

'decrepit old man' has introduced you to Jerome and Cyprian and Augustine, and is even now making you acquainted with Chrysostom, from whose writings, and from the works of Athanasius, he has made many a translation. He has illuminated passage after passage in the New Testament from Greek writers; if they do but turn to the index they will see at once how greatly indebted they are on the score of scholarship and of religion to this 'decrepit old man'. . . . Henceforth I shall hold them in contempt, and I only wish I had always thus treated them, for there is little fun in setting oneself to drown the croaking of frogs. These men that set at nought both the laws of man and of God have heroically declared, 'We ought to obey God rather than man,' a sentiment becoming the Apostles, and not altogether irrelevant in *their* case; only, mark you, the God in these two instances is not one and the same. The God of the Apostles was the Maker of heaven and earth; their god is their belly."

Occasionally the attacks made upon Erasmus were trivial in the extreme. Bilibald Pirckheimer had a capital tale to tell. He was present one evening at a dinner attended by most of the leading "lights" of Nuremberg. The talk at table veered round to the subject of Erasmus and his work, and several persons in the company loudly sang his praises, to the evident vexation of a portly

friar, who vigorously ejaculated and shook his head. "What have you against my friend?" asked Pirckheimer. "Many things," was the reply. "Name them," challenged the company, "name one thing." When the pious man had obtained sufficient command of himself he ventured to say, "Though I had made up my mind not to breathe this matter to a living soul, I will give way to your urgency and tell you that this darling Erasmus of yours is *a great eater of fowls!*"—consternation—"I do not give you this item of news," continued the portly friar, "as something I have heard about; when I was with him at Basel I saw what I tell you with my own pair of eyes." "You don't say so," exclaimed Pirckheimer. "Excuse me, but will you be so kind as to tell us whether the fowls were stolen or bought?" "Bought." "In that case," said Pirckheimer, "the fox who descends into my pen every day and runs away with a fowl is a far greater scamp, for he never pays a bawbee. But, tell me, is it a sin to eat fowls?" "Certainly," was the answer, "for it is gluttony, a sin all the more heinous in men who have taken vows." "It may be," suggested Pirckheimer, "that he eats them on fast-days?" "Not so," answered the monk, "he eats them any and every day, and we men of the cowl ought to put a prophylactic knife to our throats and eat nothing that savours of luxury." "Still, my good father," slyly observed

Pirckheimer, "unless I am mistaken, you did not cultivate that massive stomach of yours on wheat meal or barley bread; and if all the fowls with which you have stuffed it could but raise their voice and cackle, the noise would drown the trumpets of an army!"

CHAPTER XI

CONTROVERSY WITH LUTHER ON THE FREEDOM OF THE WILL

POPE LEO X. died on the 1st of December, 1521; his successor, Adrian VI., formerly Divinity Professor at Louvain University, also tutor to Prince Charles and Ambassador to the Court of King Ferdinand of Aragon, had held the regency, after Ferdinand's death, in conjunction with Cardinal Ximenes. At the time of his election he was acting as Governor of Spain, and it was close upon a year after Leo's death before he could arrange his affairs and take up his quarters in Rome.

Erasmus hoped much from the elevation of his old schoolfellow to St. Peter's chair. Leo had been friendly to letters and had gathered around him many brilliant men in literature and the arts; Adrian, he was convinced, would be none the less cordial in his support of the common cause. Ecclesiastically he would prove to be, his partisans predicted, a firm and gracious ruler. It was certain he would go a long way in the direction of reform. To many it seemed as though in the

providence of God he had been called to the Papal throne in the fulness of the times, so that by judicious and manly government he might heal the Church's wounds and check, if possible, the spread of schism.

Erasmus had his own ideas, we learn from his letter of congratulation to Adrian, concerning the methods which, if adopted, would be most likely to put an end to the present distress, and should the Pope desire he intimated that he was prepared to place his scheme before him. The new dignitary being pleased to hearken, Erasmus expounded his plan. "This malady has become too widespread and deep to permit of a cure by excommunication or the stake. In some such way as this, I admit, England, helped by her kings, broke the back of the Wickliffite movement, but even in this case the flame was smothered rather than extinguished. Besides, it is a question with me whether a plan of campaign which has proved to be a success in a comparatively small State under one monarch would turn out satisfactory in a kingdom so extensive as ours, parcelled out as it is between a number of rulers. Sure I am that if the policy contemplated be that of imprisonment, lashing, pillage, exile, harsh treatment and death I may as well spare my breath. Indications are not wanting, however, that your humane disposition dictates another course of action altogether, and that you would rather mend than end. . . . In the

first place disorders must be traced to their fountain-head and this must be purified. It is advisable, too, that all who have been led astray by the teachings of others should be pardoned their misdeeds. Does not God thus show mercy unto us blotting out our sins every day, and should not the Vicar of God do likewise? Meanwhile new departures which tend more to riot than to righteousness must be kept within bounds by magistrates and kings. I should rejoice if in some way or other the rage for pamphleteering might be controlled. And more, let men be encouraged to believe that the irregularities complained of will soon be adjusted. At the fair name of freedom everybody will breathe again. The demands of freedom will be met in so far as true religion is not thereby impaired; no one will try to ride rough-shod over another's conscience, nor will princes and bishops fail to receive all due respect. . . . If your Holiness asks, 'Where is the fountain-head of all the mischief, and what are the irregularities protested against?' I would suggest that men of unimpeachable life, thoughtful, gentle, kindly, of cautious temperament, gather together to consider these things."

But the *rôle* of independent critic and adviser exasperates so long as the speaker sits in his own armchair. Adrian now joins the general cry—'Let that suffice, most forcible Feeble'; do something yourself; arise to the help of the Lord, to

the help of the Lord against the mighty; make full proof of your ministry; consecrate your brilliant powers to the glory of God; write—*write*—WRITE.

At length Erasmus took up his pen. Adrian did not live to see the treatise on Free-Will—*De Libero Arbitrio*—which came from the Froben Press in September, 1524, but his successor, Clement VII., nephew of Lorenzo the Magnificent, was thankful to witness this sword-play between the champions. It was no small gain to the Church that Erasmus had been drawn out into the open against Luther, even though the point in dispute at first sight appeared to be a side issue—the relation of the human will to the Divine grace—one of those problems which men will continue to discuss till the end of days.

Luther had laid himself open to attack by his acceptance of the Augustinian view of predestination and the inability of man, and, as is usually the case, the disciple had far outrun his master. Anxious to glorify God in the work of salvation he had gone to the extreme of denying the inherent right of manhood—a soul free-born. Man could do nothing meritorious in the sight of God. His salvation was of God, and of God alone. "Miserable creatures that we are! We sleep half our lives; we give God a tenth of our time; and yet we think that with our good works we can merit heaven! What have I been doing to-day? I have talked for

two hours ; I have been at meals three hours ; I have been idle four hours ! Ah, enter not into judgment with thy servant, O Lord." But if man had little or no merit of his own, could not merit be bought ? Tetzel and the monks had been selling the merits not of themselves only, but of all the saints. Luther's soul burned within him. To put an end to this unrighteous traffic he declared that the pardon-vendors had nothing to sell, that the saints had no store of merits, but that the purest deed of the most holy of men is a sin in the sight of heaven, and will bring upon him sure condemnation unless the curse is removed by the act of faith and the mercy of God.

In spite of a letter of entreaty in the course of which Luther begged his friend not to descend into the theological arena as a combatant, but to remain a spectator if he could not conscientiously take up their cause, Erasmus levelled his artillery and opened fire :—

"A faithful saying truly, and worthy of all acceptation, which robs us of all pride, which concentrates all hope upon Christ and ascribes to Him all glory, which casts out all fear of men and of devils, and while taking away all confidence in self makes us unashamed and bold towards God. These sentiments I accept right heartily until things are carried to a perilous extreme. When I am told that man is so completely without merit,

that the works of the righteous are all and altogether sinful; when word goes forth that the human will is as helpless to affect anything as is clay in the hands of the potter . . . I find myself agitated with conflicting thoughts and emotions." Should not men hesitate, Erasmus asks, to impute to the Divine Being principles of government which, judged according to human standards, would be acknowledged as inexcusable and unjust? Suppose a slave-driver whipped one of his men to death because he had been born with a crooked nose! The slave might reasonably protest against the injustice of being punished for something he could in no wise avoid. Especially would he have ground for complaint if his master had it within his own power to make good the imperfection, as it is in the power of God to supply what is lacking to the will of man, or if the slave-driver had been himself the cause of the blemish, as God is said to be the author of all evil as well as of all good. Where is the man who would continue, on this theory, to war the good warfare against fleshly lusts? How is it possible to love a God who has made ready a hell of torture wherein He may punish in men evil works for which they cannot be held responsible, and which are, in point of fact, His very own? It is right, argues Erasmus, to magnify the grace of God; it is not right to make God unjust. "Personally I

prefer," he says, "the opinion of those who allow something to Free-Will, but more to grace."

In this short treatise, running only to sixteen folio pages, some of Erasmus's smartest writing is to be found. Turn to the paragraph which discusses the office of the Spirit in the interpretation of Scripture. "If Paul directed the men of his day, when the gift of the Spirit was liberally bestowed, to prove the spirits, whether they be of God, what shall we do in this worldly age? And how shall we prove the spirits? By learning? On both sides men of learning are to be found. By the life? On both sides there are sinners. In the other world the entire assembly of saints subscribe to the doctrine of the freedom of the will. . . . But some one asks, 'How is the meaning of Scripture determined by majorities?' I retort, 'How is it determined by minorities?' The question comes, 'What assistance does the mitre give in the interpretation of Scripture?' I retort, 'What assistance does the cloak give or the cowl?' The question comes, 'What connection is there between a knowledge of philosophy and a knowledge of Scripture?' I retort, 'What connection is there between ignorance and the same?' The question comes, 'How can a General Council in which there may not be a single person possessed by the Divine Spirit determine the true interpretation of Scripture?' I retort, 'How can

a handful of persons who are far more likely to be destitute of the Spirit determine this?'"

Luther's reply—*De Servo Arbitrio*—was delayed twelve months. "It is no pleasant task," writes Luther to Spalatin, "to prepare an answer to so unlearned a treatise by so learned a man." The answer, when it did appear, was unequivocal and even startling. No attempt was made to smooth the rough edges of words. Will any man, Erasmus had asked, set about the conquest of his own evil heart on Luther's theory? Indeed no, is Luther's reply, nor on any other man's theory. The elect will have their hearts purified for them by a power not themselves: reprobates will perish, being left to themselves. But is not this to make God the author of evil? Yes, and no, is Luther's reply. "A man driving a lame horse goes about his work exactly in the same way as does the man who drives a sound one, the horse goes badly nevertheless; and so God, although incapable of doing evil, yet does evil deeds through wicked men whom he uses as his instruments." When illustrations become arguments novelists may theologise. Occasionally Luther strikes a note of vehemence: "In my eyes this doctrine"—the inability of man—"is vital, necessary, eternal, so grave and far-reaching in its issues that one must be prepared, if needs be, to sacrifice life itself in its exposition and defence." Erasmus, in allowing "something to Free-Will,"

had lifted his dagger, Luther believed, "against the throat," *i.e.*, the doctrine of justification by faith, without the works of the law. "Erasmus is everlastingly saying that where freedom is not, merit is not; and that where there is no merit there can be no reward. St. Paul, however, declares justification to be a perfectly free gift, a blessing bestowed altogether apart from individual merit. . . . Now the champions of Free-Will when faced with the question, 'How is it that God justifies this man rather than that man,' cannot hit upon any other answer than the supposition of varying wills; this man, say they, puts forth exertions, that man does not; God is pleased with the one who uses the power that is in him and displeased with the other. In this way our gracious God is made out to be a respecter of persons, of works, of merits."

The *De Servo Arbitrio* provoked a heated reply entitled, *Hyperaspistes*, Books I. and II. Luther's anger stirred up Erasmus's wrath, and we have the unpleasant sequel of personal recriminations, each indicting the other in the most unqualified terms. The "little rift within the lute" rapidly widened, and in the end he who was once Luther's "dearest brother" and the "most honoured of men" is transformed into "that venomous viper, Erasmus of Rotterdam, the most inflated soul in all the world". The one fault which the authorities of

Rome had to find with the *De Libero Arbitrio* was that Erasmus's language was too moderate, too respectful towards his opponent; this defect, so called, was mended with vigour in the *Hyperaspistes*. Accusations of ignorance, impudence, and even of untruthfulness and blasphemy are in this work levelled against Luther, whose name, it is predicted, will one day be held in greater execration by mankind than any other name under the sun!

During the clash of this controversy Erasmus took the opportunity of writing a long explanatory letter to Philip Melanchthon, Luther's friend and coadjutor. He had been inveigled into publishing his treatise on the freedom of the will, he avers, by the well-meant action of friends who, in order to meet the charge everywhere levelled against him that he was in collusion with Luther, had announced that he was an opponent of Luther and not an ally, and that he was about to issue a work which would shake the very foundation on which the Wittenbergers were building. Melanchthon would perceive at once the difficulty in which he was placed; if he had held back his treatise he would have been dubbed a coward, and it would have been thought that the work contemplated, but suppressed, was far more violent than the one actually published had proved to be. "I am unable to say," he continues, "what kind of a Church you are building up in the world, but this I do

know that within its borders are men of revolutionary mind who will provoke coercive measures on the part of the authorities to the injury of the good if happily to the check of the evil. Such men are always talking about 'the Gospel,' 'the word of God,' 'faith,' 'Christ,' 'the Spirit,' but when you come to examine their lives you find that their language is quite of another kind. So we have reached this pass that we are ready to set aside leaders like the Popes and the Bishops in order that we may allow such madmen as Otto and Farel to reign ever us."

The gracious firmness of Melanchthon dictated a model reply. "You do not complain without cause, my dear Erasmus, of the way many professing Christians bear themselves in our day. . . . Do not place Luther, however, in the same category with these; he mourns as deeply as we do their inconsistencies, while he himself is quite free from such things in his own character and life." If any man could have brought Luther and Erasmus into line, the one best fitted to mediate was Melanchthon. "I have read all your '*Commonplaces*,'" wrote Erasmus, "and I greatly admire your frank and kindly genius." Melanchthon had acknowledged that Erasmus was "the first theologian to return to the sources," and had felt himself honoured by the designation, "Erasmus the Second". The salt of humanism

seasoned all his theology. It was as a teacher of Greek that he came to Wittenberg, and when Luther turned him aside from the classics in order to make a theologian of him he had serious misgivings. It troubled him to see Homer going a-begging and Demosthenes without hearers in the schools. We hear him bewailing in his letters, again and again, the decline of literature, neglect of which would bring upon Germany "a Scythian barbarism or something worse". But in spite of his humanistic sympathies his mind was more powerfully influenced by the Lutheran theology than by the classics. In the end Erasmus was to him, as to Luther, a doubter, a scoffer, an Epicurus, a Lucian. The breach was final and irreparable. "I look upon Erasmus," announces Luther in his downright way, "as the worst enemy that Christ has had for a thousand years."

CHAPTER XII

LITERARY LABOURS AT BASEL AND AT FREIBURG—DEATH—ERASMUS THE BOOKMAN—CONCLUSION

IT would have been some consolation if the breach on the one side had led to a proper and cordial understanding on the other, but this was not to be. Conflict with the Reformers did not necessarily mean peace with the Holy See. Romish doctors distrusted Erasmus even while he was professing his undying attachment to the Papal throne, and fighting Lutheranism with his bitterest pen. Accordingly we find the University of Paris condemning, in 1526 (the date of the first *Hyperaspistes*), the New Testament *Paraphrases* and the *Familiar Colloquies,* prohibiting the latter to all candidates for degrees. "The author," so ran the sentence, "ridicules, satirises and sneers at the Christian religion and its holy ceremonies and observances, tears them to shreds and decrees their abolition."

The main mover in this business was one Natalis Bedda, the Syndic of the Sorbonne, a Carthusian, in whom, to use Erasmus's phrase, "three thousand

monks lay hid". A volume, more correctly a medley, made up of snippets from Erasmus's works, was rushed through the press. Sentences that appeared to lean sympathetically towards the doctrines of the Reformers were pounced upon, torn from their context and thrown together, until Bedda had succeeded, according to Erasmus's reckoning, in placing on record no fewer than one hundred and eighty-one lies, three hundred and ten calumnies and forty-seven blasphemies. "Bedda has been guilty of so many palpable falsehoods that if the supreme pontiff himself should sanction them, it would be necessary to appeal from Pope Drowsy to Pope Wide-awake; nor would black be white even though the Pope of Rome were to say so." Bedda, it seems, was a perfect genius at phrase perversion. "He could," says Erasmus, "twist and falsify anything however perfectly worded. Take, for example, the Lord's Prayer. . . . With your permission I will treat it after the manner of Bedda. '*Our Father which art in heaven, Hallowed be Thy name.*' This betokens Arianism; no mention is made of the Son and of the Holy Ghost, the implication evidently being that prayer is to be addressed to the Father alone as the one and only true God. '*Our Father*'—an ambiguous phrase!—may not men conclude that they are the children of God by nature in like manner

as was Jesus Christ? It would have been better to say, '*Our Father by adoption and not by nature*'." Bedda, of course, had taxed Erasmus with being hand and glove with Luther. "Certainly," is the reply, "Erasmus is as much at one with Luther as the nightingale is with the cuckoo." But how is it, asks Erasmus, that Bedda had not himself engaged Luther hand to hand? What a pair of gladiators they would have made! But perhaps the most urgent things Bedda needed to do were, first of all, to seek and obtain the Divine forgiveness for his many and grievous backbitings, and secondly, to rub up his knowledge of grammar!

Francis I. prohibited by edict the sale of Bedda's medley after Erasmus had made appeal to him, but not before the libel had done its work. The Syndic of the Sorbonne had not been opposing the arch-heretic single-handed; Albertus Pius, the Prince of Carpi, had fulminated against him in two considerable volumes proving to the satisfaction of the monks that Erasmus was neither a philosopher nor a theologian, and that all the hubbub of recent years was due in the main to him.

During these controversial years Erasmus found time to write various works of a semi-devotional order. *The Use and Abuse of the Tongue* was published in August, 1525, and in the following year his *Christian Widow*, a compliment to Maria,

sister of Charles V. and widow of the King of Bohemia, and his *Institution of Christian Matrimony*, a book dedicated to Catherine of Arragon, Queen of Henry VIII., and written at the request of Lord Mountjoy. Matrimony is declared to be the root and fountain whence proceed the deepest joys and the most unspeakable sorrows. And yet strange to say there is scarcely any department of duty more neglected by Christians than this. The choice of a life-partner is perhaps the most serious step a man or woman can ever take; it behoves them to look well before they leap. "Let me recommend you, first of all, to pray earnestly for a right and happy judgment. . . . People who choose a son-in-law or a daughter-in-law because of their wealth, or their age, or their family connections, often bring about an unfortunate union, for the happiness of marriage consists mainly in the harmony which exists between virtuous persons of equal station and birth. . . . Pass under review, first, mental qualities, then personal endowments, and lastly things considered apart from these. As to the first, it must be borne in mind that there are certain gifts, such as quickness of perception, retentiveness of memory, learning, eloquence, astuteness, alertness, which do not necessarily attend goodness, and that there are other qualities, such as chastity, sobriety, modesty, truth, prudence, faith, insepar-

able from a virtuous and therefore happy life. . . . Conversation is a sure indication of the speaker's type of mind. 'Speak, young man,' Socrates used to say, 'that I may see you,' for he used to look through his ears as well as by means of his eyes. Some people imagine they have seen the woman they purpose marrying when they have gazed into her face; if, however, they really want to see her they must have talk with her lest they be deceived. Inquiry should be made into the manner of her upbringing. It is important that she should have been well-born; it is even more important that she should have been properly trained. . . . Remember, too, that persons of like temperament are not usually suited the one to the other. A young man of sluggish disposition should seek a wife of active temperament. A husband whose ideas outrun his means should have a thrifty housewife, who will watch every penny. . . . When making our choice we shall weigh the advice of our elders or parents, not only because love, being 'blind,' frequently plays tricks upon young men and maidens, but also because those who have lived many days and have put the world to test are in a more favourable position than the young to attain unto sound judgment. . . . When one is 'in love' depraved qualities often wear the look of goodness. A young suitor of impetuous and passionate mind is spoken of as brave; the prodigal

is called generous. Similarly, a young girl who can rap out an oath, or give back in conversation one better than she gets, is said to be a vivacious dame. . . . If she behaves herself seemly at meal-times and eats and drinks sparingly, . . . if she never puts out her left hand when it is proper to offer the right, if she touches her food with the tips of her fingers, if, when she laughs, she never shows her teeth—she is a maiden worthy of all praise, and greatly to be desired. A young woman who has been well brought up in matters such as these is sure to make, so men think, a suitable wife. Not necessarily; virtue must the rather be rooted in the mind, and must manifest itself without pretence in the very brow, and eyes, and face, and in every movement of the body. . . . To be attracted only by personal beauty is to love a rose which soon will fade. A fair skin is often like a false dye. . . . Cultivate the philosophic eye, and gaze into the beauty of the soul. . . . Whoso feareth the Lord and observeth His commandments is without spot or wrinkle. . . . Listen to the word of the prophet: 'All flesh is grass, and all the goodliness thereof is as the flower of the field. The grass withereth, the flower fadeth: . . . but the word of our God shall stand for ever.' . . . What is outward beauty but the flower of the field? But there is another type of beauty, which shall persist even unto extreme old age: 'The

word of our God shall stand for ever'. Where this Divine Word flourishes perpetual grace and beauty are to be found, ensuring a love unfailing and eternal."

In the light of subsequent events Erasmus's views on the question of divorce are significant; Queen Catherine would appreciate them, the King would shrug his broad shoulders and turn the page. "Grant that the laws of the Jews and of heathen peoples make provision for divorce, thus allowing men to put away their wives, yet the common sentiment of mankind classes divorce along with ingratitude and the betrayal of friendship. Where divorce takes place the marriage has never been real. If it be true to say that a friendship which can be broken has never been a real friendship, we may, with greater truth, say that a marriage which can be dissolved has never been a real marriage."

The *Christiani Matrimonii Institutio* furnished Erasmus with the opportunity of entering upon a full discussion of the vexed question of the relation of the priesthood to marriage, but one examines the work in vain for a clear pronouncement on this somewhat perilous topic. Perhaps Erasmus thought that he had singed himself enough with the burning questions of his day. It is clear from sentences here and there, and especially from less guarded statements in his

correspondence, that he classed priestly marriage among the "indifferent things"; each man must be fully persuaded in his own mind. "I never encouraged any priest to enter into marriage," he writes to Hedio, "nor have I ever placed a straw in the way of any one who desired to marry." Clerical morality, according to Erasmus, was at very low ebb. "If the popular story is true that antichrist will be born of a monk and a nun, how many thousand antichrists must there now be in the world!" The views and practice of the Reformers provoked him to merriment. "I really hoped that Luther's wife would have tamed him, but no!——" "Œcolampadius has lately taken a wife, and not a bad-looking girl either. . . . Some people talk of the Lutheran tragedy; it seems to me that it is a comedy; for it always ends in a wedding."

Other works of this period were a new edition of Pliny's *Natural History*, an edition of the works of Irenæus, an edition of Ambrose in four volumes, an essay on *The Right Pronunciation of Latin and Greek*, various translations from Galen and Chrysostom and Athanasius, a treatise on *The True Way of Prayer*, and a dialogue entitled *Ciceronianus*, a clever skit upon those writers and orators who aped the style of Cicero, and refused to use any word or phrase which could not be directly traced to their master, or which had not, at least, a

Ciceronian look or sound. Nosoponus, the representative in the dialogue of this pedantic cult, declares that he has read nothing but Cicero for a round seven years, and that he has been as careful to ignore all other writers as a Carthusian monk is to close his mouth against—beefsteak. He also informs a friend who is questioning him about these matters that he has made and "kept"—posted up to date—three immense dictionaries, or indices, containing Ciceronian words, phrases, the feet with which sentences are opened and closed, and the different methods of word arrangement in the middle of sentences. To inspire him in his literary pains he had the bust of Cicero always before him, and the seal of Cicero always to his hand. The toil of a modern R. L. Stevenson in forming his style is mere play in comparison with the Herculean labours of a Nosoponus.

Erasmus ridicules the whole business in delightful fashion. The best time for the Ciceronian to write is the dead of night. His study must be in the very heart of the house, the walls must be thick, the doors and windows double, every chink and crevice must be stuffed up, so that no noise from without may disturb the author's calm. [One thinks of Carlyle and his soundless room. Is the peculiarity of his style due to some occult Ciceronian method of vocabularising?] No bedroom must be near lest a sleeper should snore and frighten

M. Tully away. Ten currants and three coriander seeds coated with sugar are found to be most helpful in the work of Ciceronian composition. After a long night's research and word-hunting a sentence of some kind or other is strung together. The mountain has brought forth a mouse.

Erasmus did not thus poke fun at the disciple because he despised the master. He admits that Seneca was more of a favourite with him in his youthful days than Cicero, and that he was twenty years of age before he began properly to appreciate him. In riper years—at the time when he wrote his *Ciceronianus*—M. Tully was "a master beloved," both for the grace of his style and the sanctity of his mind.

It was not therefore Erasmus's aim to discourage the study of Cicero, but to guard it from abuse. Hero-worship is a snare when men can see one face only, and hear no voice save the one they admire. The Ciceronian in his exclusive devotion was anti-christian. "Jupiter Optimus Maximus" sounded more sweetly in his ears than "Jesus Christus redemptor mundi"; and the phrase 'Patres conscripti" was more precious far than the words "Sancti apostoli". "What is at the back of all this glorification of Cicero? I will answer in one or two words, whispered into your ears. It is a mere cloak for Paganism, the revival of which is more to them than the glory of our Lord." "One

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day," Luther had prophesied, "new lights will rise up, and the Scriptures will be despised and flung away in a corner." This day had come.

In the midst of his Basel literary works and controversies Erasmus's friend, Froben, passed away—1527. The pain of severance, he tells us, was less when his brother died than when Froben left him. "He was an ideal friend, so ingenuous and sincere that even if he had wished to conceal anything he could not have done it, so repugnant was it to his nature. . . . He was a man of such unswerving integrity that the saying, 'You could throw dice with him when the candle is out' applies to no one more truthfully than to him. . . . He had no more idea of the symptoms of a malady like envy than a man born blind has of colour. He had no memory for injuries, he never forgot the most trivial service. . . . Speaking personally, what traps did he not lay, what opportunities did he not seek, to press some gift upon me. He was never happier than when he had succeeded, by wiles or by entreaty, in loading me with some present or other. In these matters I had need to meet his stratagems with cunning, nor have I ever needed to manipulate words so artfully as when shaping a pretext for declining his favours without giving umbrage to my friend; for it troubled me to see him put about."

Froben was a genuine bibliophile, as every

publisher ought surely to be. "Sometimes, when he laid before me and other friends the first sheets of some eminent author, he was almost beside himself! How his face beamed again! how exultingly he spake! It would have seemed to you that he had already fingered every penny of profit the completed work could bring him, and that he looked for no other reward."

After Froben's death Erasmus prepared himself to forsake Basel. The city, under the influence of Œcolampadius, was becoming more pronouncedly Lutheran every day. At length in April, 1529, the progress of the Reformed faith and mob violence compelled him to remove to Freiburg, a town within the Austrian frontier. The account he gives of the establishment of Protestantism and the overthrow of Roman Catholicism is exceedingly graphic. "The rabble heaped such insults on the images of the saints, and on the crucifix itself, that it was astonishing there was no miracle, considering how many there always used to be whenever the saints were offended in the slightest degree. Not a single statue remained in church or monastery. The pictures on the walls were daubed all over with a kind of whitewash. Everything that would burn was thrown to the flames. If anything was proof against fire it was ground to powder. . . . You were not permitted to celebrate mass even in your own home."

In this letter to his friend Pirckheimer, Erasmus could not resist the temptation of playing off his wit upon the miracle-working saints. "We are told," he writes again, "that St. Francis used to be highly incensed when any one chanced to speak flippantly concerning his five wounds, and he was not alone in this, several other saints were equally sensitive and as easily offended. Odd—isn't it?—that at Basel not a solitary saint should have lifted a blessed finger. One can understand the patience of our Lord and of the Virgin Mary, but that the saints——!"

Erasmus was received at Freiburg with every mark of respect. He took up his abode at first in a house which Ferdinand, uncle to Charles V., had occupied; two years later he purchased another and rebuilt it at great expense. "And now let me tell you a thing," he writes to John Rinckius, "which is sure to tickle you. If any one informed you that Erasmus, now close upon seventy years of age, had married, would you not mark yourself with the sign of the cross at least half a dozen times? I know that you would, and you might well. But, my dear Rinckius, I have done something quite as bothersome and worrying to me, something quite as remote from all my habits and tastes. I have bought a house, folk praise it certainly, but it has cost me a pretty penny. Who now will despair of seeing rivers flowing backwards-way, when

they learn that Erasmus, who has hitherto allowed nothing to interfere with his literary pleasures, has turned himself into a trafficker, a buyer, a builder, and has begun to hobnob with carpenters and ironmongers and stonemasons and glaziers, instead of spending his time in the company of the Muses?"

During the upset of removal Erasmus made time to go through a large batch of correspondence with a view to publication. "I have marked with a floweret," he writes to John Hervagius, the successor of Froben, "those letters you might do well to pass through the press. . . . They will make up into a small book, which will, I hope, be of some value to you, let its intrinsic worth be what it may. . . . I trust the god Hermes [Hervagius's trade-mark] will direct you by a short and easy route to Plutopolis. Everybody is running thither nowadays as fast as their legs will carry them, but not every one runs and obtains." The volume appeared in September, 1531, under the title *Epistolæ Floridæ*.[1] This work had been preceded by the *Opus Epistolarum* of 1529, a collection of letters divided into twenty-four books, "so that the reader may know where to look for what he wants," another edition of which was published within a few months of

[1] *Vide* note on Erasmus's *Epistles*, Appendix ii., page 213, for list and dates of other collected editions.

Erasmus's death. It is pleasant to see the humorous gleam in those bluish-grey eyes, and the crows'-feet deepening at the corners of the old man's brow as he sits down to write his final preface to "friendly readers," and to announce his pathetic verdict, "Man is a bubble". "People are more pleased to read letters addressed to others than letters sent to themselves, because they imagine there is more truth in them". Those so-called literary persons who contrive to get hold of a man's writings and who publish to the author's discredit works which he never intended should see the light "deserve to be suffocated in burnt paper". "Letters written on a formal subject to display the correspondent's erudition are not letters at all."

Freiburg was a place to rest in, but the world was in sad confusion, and the strife of tongues disturbed him even there. Within a month of his arrival he writes: "All grows wilder and wilder. Men talk of heresy and orthodoxy, of antichrists and Catholics, but none speak of Christ. The world is in labour. Good may come if Christ directs the birth. There is no help else. Paganism comes to life again; Pharisees fight against the Gospel; in such a monstrous tempest we need skilful pilots. Christ has been sleeping so far. I trust the prayers of the faithful will wake Him. He may then command sea and

waves, and they will obey Him. The monks have howled. The theologians have made articles of belief. We have had prisons, informations, bulls and burnings; and what has come of them? Outcries enough; but no crying to Christ. Christ will not awake till we call to Him in sincerity of heart. Then He will arise and bid the sea be still, and there will be a great calm."[1]

The Diet of Augsburg was held on 8th April, 1530, but an attack of illness prevented Erasmus from sharing in the deliberations. He took his disappointment, such as it was, philosophically. "If I had gone I should only have brought fresh trouble on myself, without being able to pour oil on the turbulent waters." But he was not the only helpless man in the world. "You may hold ten Diets," he writes to Melanchthon, "but God alone can untwist the tangle." "Friends keep me posted up in the progress of the Diet," he tells John Rinckius. "Three points have been laid down: First, that the Germans shall lend all the help in their power against the Turks; second, that doctrinal differences shall be composed, as far as may be, without resort to arms; and third, that all grievances shall be looked into and redressed. A council might sit for three long years and yet fail to carry through a programme such as

[1] *Vide* Froude's *Erasmus*, p. 371.

this. What the end will be I am at a loss to know. Unless God interposes in this matter I see no way of escape, and should any of the States refuse to accept the Council's finding, we shall see revolution yet."

The bloodshed which Erasmus feared was postponed, and the apprehensive scholar never saw the worst come to the worst. Guided by the Emperor, the Diet of Augsburg had renewed the formal condemnation of Luther's writings. During the sittings of the council an edict went forth to the effect that the true Catholic worship must be reinstated everywhere in Germany, and all Church property restored. The princes who had formed themselves into the Protestant League made ready for the conflict. The Emperor, recognising that the Lutherans meant business, and all too conscious of the political complications of Europe, stayed his hand. The hour of madness at the stake and on the gallows had not yet come.

Circumstances such as these were not ideal conditions for authorship, but in spite of personal sickness, councils and rumours of war Erasmus held himself to his desk. While the Diet was assembling he edited and published a work of Algerus, a Benedictine of the eleventh century, dealing with one of the most debated topics of the day—the Real Presence. The treatise of Algerus was written as a counterblast to the

teaching of Berengar, of Tours. "I have never doubted," writes Erasmus in his preface, "the truth of the Lord's body, but somehow by the reading of this book my opinion has been confirmed and my reverence increased. . . . Innumerable questions start in one's mind relating to this sacrament—how the elements are transubstantiated; how accidents can exist without a substance; how the bread and wine, after consecration, can retain the qualities they possessed before consecration, *viz.*, the colour, the smell, the taste, the power to intoxicate and to nourish; at what moment the elements begin to be the body and blood of Christ; what happens when the bread and wine become mouldy and corrupt; how the same body can be in countless places at one and the same time; how the actual body of a man can be hidden with a crumb of bread, and many other problems of a like nature, to the solution of which learned men may well devote their powers. As to the common people it is sufficient for them to believe that, after consecration, the true body and blood of the Lord are really present, and that these cannot be divided, or destroyed, or in any way damaged, whatever treatment is meted out to the elements themselves."

The other works of this period are the *Apophthegmata, or Sayings of the Ancients* (1531), a work

first issued in six volumes, later in eight; a treatise on *Preparation for Death* (1533); a *Catechism on the Apostles' Creed, the Decalogue and the Lord's Prayer* (1533); the *Ecclesiastes or Preacher* (1535), and numerous editorial projects besides — the works of Augustine in ten volumes; the works of Basil, and the orations of Demosthenes. "We kiss the old shoes of the saints," said he when busy with his translations of the Church Fathers, "but we never read their works."

Peaceful and happy as the six years at Freiburg had been, Erasmus was unwilling to make it his final home. In August, 1535, he returned to Basel to die. A letter dated 14th August is pathetic reading: "My life has been long if measured by years. Take from it the time lost in struggling against disease, it has not been so very long after all. You talk of the great name I shall leave behind me, and which posterity is never to let die. Very kind and friendly on your part, but I care nothing for fame and nothing for posterity. I desire only to go home and to find favour with Christ."

The desire for "home" would be intensified when news came of the martyrdoms of Fisher and Sir Thomas More. Henry, hearing that the Pope had destined Fisher for a cardinal's chair, had hastened the end. "That," said Erasmus, referring to Fisher's death on the scaffold, "that was the red hat which *he* gave him."

The reunion with his friends was not long delayed. He was in the hospitable home of Jerome Froben, a son of his old friend, and everything was done to smooth his pathway that loving hearts could do. To the last his pen was in his hand, and when death came on the 12th July, 1536, he was absorbed in his task of restoring the Greek text of Origen. "Oh, Jesus Christ, Son of God, have mercy upon me! I will sing of the mercy of God and of His judgment:" with these words on his lips he laid himself down in the chamber called Peace, whose windows open toward the sunrising, to sleep till the breaking of the Day.

All Basel mourned at the funeral. Students carried the body on their shoulders to the cathedral; the chief magistrate, many members of the city council, and the professors of the university walked in procession to the grave. The spot chosen was on the left side of the church, by the chapel of the Virgin, near the steps that lead up to the choir.

The discussion of Erasmus's attitude towards the Lutheran movement has necessarily involved us in considerations of moral character, and in an attempt to place him amongst the thinkers and workers of his time. Perhaps sufficient has been

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suggested on these lines. The temptation of the biographer is to say too much about Erasmus the Churchman and the Reformer, too little about Erasmus the Humanist and the man. After all, the first and last love of his life was literature. "We are heart and soul in letters, a life of the gods, if only we had a few more books," a pathetic "if" indeed, to be understood of all bookmen. "Others may burden themselves with gold if they will, they may attain unto the loftiest heights of fame, while I am rewarded by the Muses with nought but laborious days and the detraction of my fellows—even so, I shall never forsake them as long as I can hold my reason and preserve my disgust of the world." The chief use of money in his eyes, dearly as he loved his silver and gold, was—the exchange of it for books. When his poverty was turned he would "first of all buy some Greek authors, and then a suit of clothes". And the books purchased were not for ornament but for use. In his judgment the book-lover is not the man of fine editions who guards his volumes under lock and key, but the man who reads them night and day, thumbs them, turns down their pages and scribbles all over the margins, correcting and noting the writer's errors, the publisher's misprints. "I would rather have my books spoiled in this way than keep them never so incorrect and clean." His delight at some rare literary "find" knew no

bounds. The coverts of an old library were beaten in high and happy expectation. Occasionally "game of no common sort" would fall unexpectedly into his hands, and this hour forthwith stood out as one of the great hours of life. To Erasmus, as to Southey, books were "all but everything". The scholar in *The Canterbury Tales* who would rather have

> at his beddes head
> A twenty bokes, clothed in black and red,
> Of Aristotle and his philosophy,
> Than robès rich, or fiddle, or psalterie,

was—who can doubt it?—Chaucer himself; but he might have been Erasmus. "You ask how I spend my time. I give myself up to the society of my friends, with whom I enjoy the most delightful intercourse. I turn aside with them into some quiet nook far from the madding crowd, and either whisper gently into their ears, or give heed to their sweet words, communing with them as with my very soul. Is not this the purest of joys? If they have a secret, they never fail to disclose it to me, while any secret of mine is perfectly safe in their faithful keeping. They speak when spoken to; when not addressed they keep silence. They will discourse on any topic one desires, and will say as much and talk as long as we wish, never indulging in flattery, making no pretence, hiding nothing, mentioning one's faults

with perfect candour, and yet robbing no man of his good name. Their speech is always entertaining and profitable. They give steadiness to the successful, comfort to the troubled, and are always the same; our companions in every time of peril and onwards through life to the grave. . . . Should you fail to interpret my parable let me say that the friends aforementioned are my books. . . . It is not necessary to do so I know, still I will continue to urge you to consecrate your best powers to worthy studies. Never be taken up with writings that are common or meretricious, but seek ever that which is highest"—advice which reminds us of Matthew Arnold's definition of criticism: a disinterested endeavour to learn and propagate the best that is known and thought in the world.

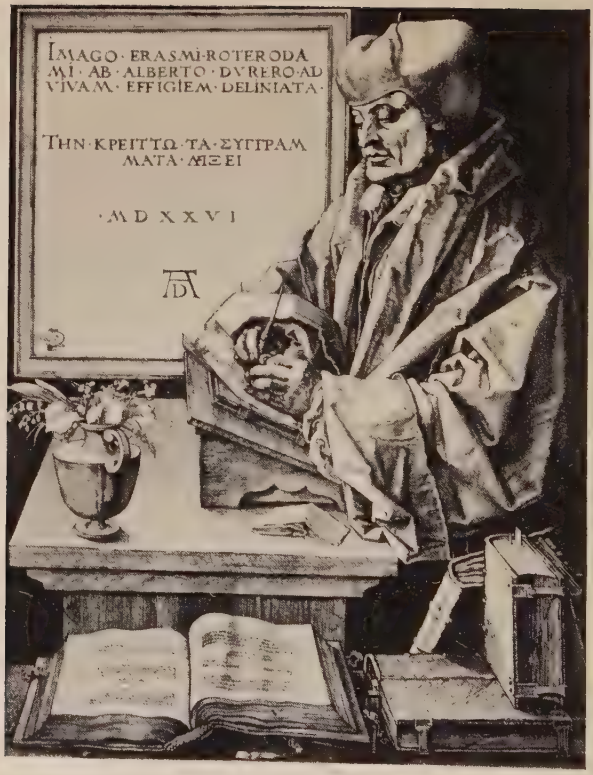
Erasmus, it is interesting to note, has given his contribution to the settlement of the question —which writings are "the best"? "I have my masters to whom I give heed. . . . In poetry my authorities are Maro, Horace, Naso, Juvenal, Statius, Martial, Claudian, Persius, Lucan, Tibullus and Propertius; in prose, Tully, Quintillian, Sallust, Terence. Then, for finish of style there is no writer that can compare with Laurentius Valla, who stands alone both with respect to the acuteness of his intellect and the breadth of his erudition. Anything written by authors other than

those I have named, I am free to confess, I dare not use. If you add other writers to this list, I shall have no quarrel with you." "Some people say that it is wrong to read the plays of Terence. Why? let me ask. The reply comes: for the simple reason that they are honeycombed with licentiousness, with descriptions of the illicit loves of passionate youth, and so this class of reading is bound to corrupt the student's mind. They seem unable to grasp the fact that this kind of literature is written in exposure of the evil, and is cultivated solely with this end in view. Terence's comedies, if properly studied, do not undermine the moral nature, rather do they energise it. To those students who would become masters of Latinity I consider them absolutely essential." In spite of his admiration of the comedies for the purity and perfection of their style, and notwithstanding his spirited defence of the poet's realism, it is a significant fact that the name of this indispensable author does not appear in the list of recommended writers which Erasmus forwarded to one of his pupils, Thomas Grey. Not every man can be safely fed with the strong meat of the realists, ancient or modern. Youth, in particular, has its perils, and Erasmus's enthusiasm for literature never led him to place needless temptations in the way of his friends. "I shall think my love towards you well repaid," he writes to young

Grey, "if I observe that the natural bent which you have towards things pure and lovely, and which I was one of the first to discover, becomes more and more manifestly a characteristic of your life; and let me urge you to do all in your power to ensure this consummation. Success will be your portion if you read the best writers and hold no intercourse with those of the vulgar and indecent sort, especially at your time of life, when you are naturally impressionable, and your tendency is towards the evil rather than towards the good. What is to be gained by reading books unfriendly to morals when there are works in abundance which are as valuable, and more so, from a literary point of view, while at the same time they are free from all uncleanness? Among the first of these you will read Virgil, Lucan, Cicero, Lactantius, Jerome, Sallust and Livy."

The judgment of an author upon his own writings is always interesting, sometimes startling. Erasmus's famous letter to Joannes Sixtinus, friend of Prior Charnock of Oxford, in reply to an eulogy upon his verses, is worthy of the best traditions of criticism: "Your entire sincerity, Sixtinus, does not admit the slightest suspicion of flattery. . . . If it were otherwise, I should certainly think myself laughed at, when I am praised so immoderately by you, and that for a thing so moderate or rather so trifling and worthless. . . . But that

I may not fail to acknowledge some of your praise, there is, in fact, Sixtinus, something Attic in my verses. They spare the feelings or touch them lightly, abstaining altogether from passion; no storm, no torrent bursting its banks, no δείνωσις. With a wonderful economy of words they choose to remain within bounds rather than be carried beyond them, and to hug the shore rather than launch into the deep. There is no high colouring, but a natural tint, real, if you like, and dingy. They so thoroughly hide any artifice, that if you were Lynceus himself, you could detect none. In this one respect I am superior to the Greeks themselves; for while they so conceal their art as to make it invisible to others, I do the same to myself. They contrive that it may not attract attention, but if it is not perceived by the gaping reader, it is plain enough to the careful student, or the rival author. . . . We do not adopt the Ennian fashion of not offering to tell of arms until we have cracked a bottle; and we do not importune any Muse. In perfect sobriety we write such sensible verses as are absolutely without any hint of Apollo. And I am so far from being sorry for this, that I am pleased with myself for having this quality in common with Cicero, as I am not likely to have any other. The fact is, I have fallen into a dry, poor, bloodless, sapless kind of poetry, partly from poverty of genius, and partly by effort



ERASMUS

Copper Engraving by A. Durer

misapplied. Cicero is rightly of opinion that nothing does so much to modify men's genius as locality. We wrote when young not for Consentine but for Dutch, that is, for very dull ears. We sang for Midases, and in adapting ourselves too religiously to them, we ended by pleasing neither them nor the learned. We tried to daub two walls out of one jar, to please the unskilful by simplicity of language, without altogether failing to please the learned by elegance and wit. This plan, clever as it then seemed to me, has turned out unsuccessful. We write too learnedly to please the unlearned, and too unlearnedly for the learned. You have now my own judgment about my verses."[1]

A glance at the amazing list of works[2] which came in rapid succession from our author's pen will convince the literary student that much remains to be done before the work of Erasmus, in anything like its entirety, can be made accessible to the English-speaking race. Mr. Henry Rogers, in his essay, "The Vanity and Glory of Literature," dwells pathetically on the mortality of the productions of genius. Immense treasures of thought —of haunting poetry, sparkling wit, ingenious argument—perish. The creations of the human mind transcend its capacity to collect and preserve

[1] *Vide* F. M. Nichols, *Epistles of Erasmus*, pp. 210, 211.

[2] Appendix II.

them. Every hour Mr. Rogers' book-pyramid becomes wider and loftier. The works of Erasmus, hidden away in the centre of this colossal and growing pile, lie out of sight of the youth of the twentieth century. It is, however, worth our while to search for them. They keep their green, these fallen leaves, "the noble letters of the dead".

APPENDIX I

TEXT OF ERASMUS'S WILL

"In the name of the Holy Trinity, I, Desiderius Erasmus, of Rotterdam, in virtue of a diploma of his Imperial Majesty, a papal brief, and the permission of the magnificent magistracy of the illustrious city of Basel, by this writing under my hand, renew my last will, which I wish to be performed, declaring all contrary dispositions made by me to be void.

"In the first place, being certain that I have no lawful heir, I appoint that most excellent man, Boniface Amerbach, heir of all my property, and Jerome Froben and Nicholas Episcopius my executors. A considerable time ago I sold my library to John à Lasco, Baron of Poland, but by the contract made between us, the books are not to be delivered to him except on payment to my heir of 200 florins. If he refuse to accede to these conditions, or dies before me, it shall be free to my heir to dispose of the books as he may think proper. To Louis Berus I bequeath my gold watch; to Beatus Rhenanus my gold cup and my gold fork; to Peter Vetereus 150 gold crowns; and as many to Philip Montanus. To my servant Lambert, should he be in my service at my decease, I bequeath 200 gold florins, unless I shall have

paid him that sum in my lifetime. I bequeath to John Brisch my silver bottle; to Paul Volzius 100 gold florins; to Sigismund Telenius 150 ducats; to John Erasmus Froben two rings, the one without a stone, and the turquoise. I bequeath to John Froben all my clothes and all my furniture, in wool, linen, or wood, also my cup engraved with the arms of the Cardinal of Maintz; and to his wife the ring with the figure of a woman looking behind her. I bequeath to Nicholas Episcopius the cup with the lid, which has some verses engraved on its foot; and to his wife Justinia two rings, the diamond one and the smaller turquoise. I bequeath to Everard Goclenius my silver cup with the figure of Fortune at the top. If any of my legatees die before me, I direct that what I have bequeathed to him shall return to my heir, who, in addition to what I have given him by will, shall take my remaining cups, rings, or other articles of the same kind, besides my coins, medals, and Portugal crosses with the image of the King of Portugal and Severinus Bonerus, and other similar articles; and also all my double and quadruple ducats. As to the money deposited by me with Everard Goclenius, my heir is to leave it with him to make that disposition of it in Brabant which I have recommended to him. If anything of mine remains in the hands of Erasmus Schetius, my heir will ask it of him; and, according to the best of his judgment, and in concert with my executors, he shall dispose of it, and of all the residue of my property, for the benefit of the aged and infirm poor, in marrying young girls, and educating young men of promise, and generally for the benefit of any other person whom he shall think deserving of assis-

tance. I have written this, my last will, that there may be no mistake about it, with my own hand, and I have sealed it with the god Terminus, my true seal. At Basel, in the house of Jerome Froben, on the twelfth day of February, in the year of our Lord, 1536." [1]

[1] *Vide* R. B. Drummond's *Erasmus*, vol. ii., pp. 338-340.

APPENDIX II

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[1] This list, extensive as it is, does not claim to be complete. A full bibliography would require a companion volume. The first work here catalogued, the *Adagia*, passed through (at least) sixty-two editions during the author's lifetime, and subsequent editions total to over 100. It is manifestly impossible, within the limits of this biography, to track the course of the various works; we can only indicate the earliest known editions of the principal writings, and note the various English translations. Knowing the pitfalls that lie in the path of the bibliographer, we use the word "early" instead of the alluring word "first". Until the scholars of Ghent University have completed their *Bibliotheca Erasmiana*, a work which, in its final form, will be the standing wonder of modern bibliography, no one will venture to dogmatise on these matters. We arrange list A in chronological order.

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